



Fate/strange fake

フェイト/ストレンジフェイク

成田良悟

Narita Ryohgo

Bonus volume for *Comptiq*, March 2009 Supplement to TYPE-MOON Ace Vol. 2

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You came upon a suburban town in the western United States: Snowfield. You were not a mage, nor did you have any supernatural powers. And yet—by some twist of fate, it came to pass that you would participate in the “War” in this town.

The “Holy Grail War”. You might have known what that ceremony entailed, but then again, you might not have. Even if you did, though, your knowledge would by and large be for naught, for the “Holy Grail War” in this town was built of countless lies and fabrications. It was, verily, a strange fake.

However, there was truth to be found as well. Six Heroic Spirits were called forth for the ceremony: Archer, Berserker, Assassin, Caster, Rider, and Lancer.

And at the heart of this banquet, this bizarre assemblage of Masters and Servants—you made your entrance in the stead of the lost “Saber” card. Will you kick over the dinner table at the heart of this deranged party? Or will you dance alongside everyone else?————It’s all up to you.

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Narita Ryohgo

Well, now, are you ready to vie for the grail in this war, a war dripping with pretension?

That new world is destroyed the instant it is born.

Six sinister spirits assemble.

The challenger is no skilled mage. Nay: he is none other than you, “A”.

Governed by four dire rules,

enveloped by a feeling of absolute powerlessness,

you are drawn to #14 time and time again.

The game master is Narita Ryohgo, wickedest of the wicked. His peals of laughter echo.

——And now, you may die, wholly and without exception.

Nasu Kinoko

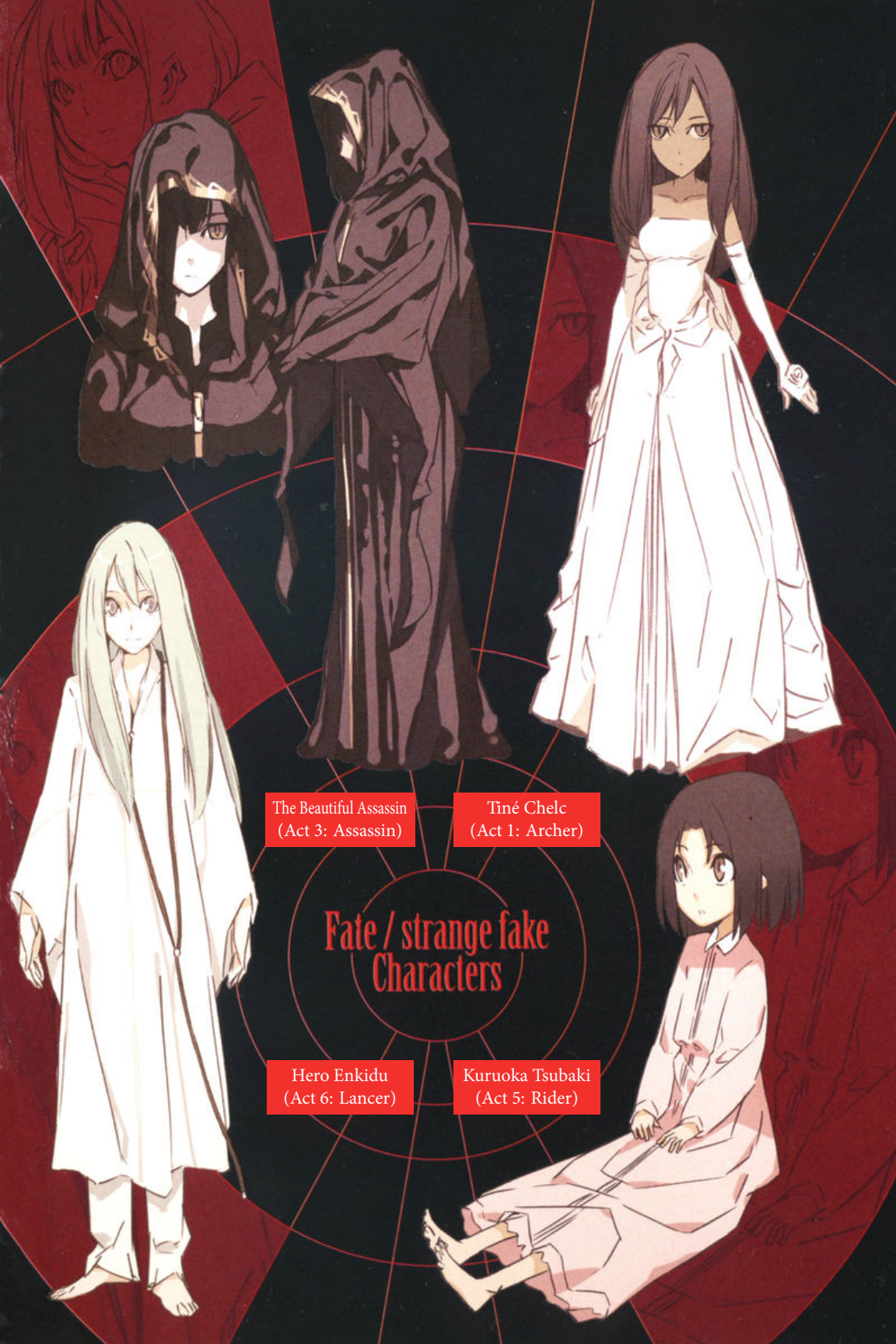


「貴方は我が国を『若い』と仰いましたが、
だからこそ覚えておくべきですよ、御老体」

「……何？」

「若い国を、あまり侮るべきではない、と」

“You referred to my nation as ‘young’.
But that is all the more reason for you to remember, elder.”
“...What?”
“That you ought not to make light of a young nation.”



The Beautiful Assassin
(Act 3: Assassin)

Tiné Chelc
(Act 1: Archer)

Fate / strange fake Characters

Hero Enkidu
(Act 6: Lancer)

Kuruoka Tsubaki
(Act 5: Rider)

Fate/strange fake

Narita Ryohgo



TYPE-MOON ACE BOOK

なA-01

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Foreword from the translator

This novel contains information pertaining to the magic of a certain lineage of magi. To avoid being spoiled, you should read the Heavens Feel route of *Fate/stay night* or read or watch *Fate/zero* before reading this novel.

This is the full version of the novel, suitable for viewing on a computer or other high-end device. To obtain the reduced version of the novel (which has a smaller filesize and some other modifications to make it suitable for low-end devices), visit [my blog](#).

nakulas

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Narita Ryohgo

Narita Ryohgo was born in Tokyo in 1980 and was raised in Saitama. He won the 9th Dengeki Game Novel Gold Prize for *Baccano!*. In addition to *Baccano!*, he is currently working on *Durarara!!*, as well as a number of other series!

Morii Shizuki

Morii Shizuki was the illustrator for this novel. She resides in Osaka. Her comic “Fate/Zero ~KIRITSUGU~” appeared in Volume 1 of *Type-Moon Ace*. She is the art director for *The Summer when the Cherry Blossoms Fell*¹, published by Dengeki Bunko.

This work was originally published on Narita Ryohgo’s personal home page as an April Fools’ joke. It has since been revised for this publication version.

Design by MIPO (Wonderhearts Planet, Inc.)

¹葉桜が来た夏

Prologue

A cleft.

That city, rising from the darkness of the surrounding hinterland, was certainly worthy of being called a “cleft”.

It was not a disjunctive barrier, of the kind that might separate day from night; light from darkness. Rather, it was a harmonious barrier, one that demarcated a boundary between things of the same ilk. That was the strange thing about the city of Snowfield.

It was a watershed, but the things it divided were not so different as magic and sorcery, nor were they as similar as men and beasts.

In a sense, it was a hazy boundary, smudged with the colors of dawn and dusk. But it was more than just a divider. It was a black nexus, begotten from a blending of pigments.

To put it differently, it was the boundary between one town and another; the boundary between nature and man; the boundary between a man and a megalopolis. It was not at all unlike that indistinct morass that separates dreams from mere sleep.

The American West. The city lay a while to the north of Las Vegas.

Its surroundings were a product of a delicate balance. North of the city was a vast ravine, reminiscent of the Grand Canyon. To the west lay a dense forest, an unusual sight in such an arid area. To the east, a tract of lakes and marshes; to the south, a vast desert unfolded.

Though the city had not one smidgen of farmland, it was surrounded in all four directions by land perfectly suited for agriculture. Indeed, that city alone was a strange existence that stood out from its

surroundings like a sore thumb.

A boomtown with its sights set on the future; a city with just the right mixture of the natural and the artificial—that was how some might describe Snowfield, dazzled by its beauty. But in reality, the city was built on arrogantly arrogant notions. Sometimes, those notions were apparent; but sometimes, they were not.

The lie of the surrounding land was as natural as it could be. It was as if that town—that cleft, that nexus, that blending of countless colors—had deemed itself fit to bring concordance unto its milieu. The town became as a black stage, evaluating all that surrounded it.

According to records pertaining to the very beginning of the 20th century, the area was home at the time to a few indigenous peoples here and there, and essentially nobody else.

Starting about 70 years ago, though, the area began to rapidly develop. By the time the 21st century rolled by, the land had undergone a total transformation. Now, it was home to a thriving city of 800,000 people.

“Of course, rapid development can happen anywhere. The fact that we have been asked to investigate such a seemingly-typical city indicates that we ought to devote special attention to the city’s origins.”

Thus grumbled an elderly man, clad in blue-black robes.

The night sky was dark, and there was not a star in the sky. It seemed like the clouds could burst open at any time.

From a sparse grove of trees at the edge of the vast forest to the west of the city, the old man peered through a pair of binoculars. As he gazed at the light thrown off by the agglomeration of skyscrapers off yonder, he went on, with disdain apparent in his voice.

“Hrm... binoculars these days really are quite handy. They come into focus with just a push of a button; and further, it’s less of a hassle to use them than to go to the trouble of sending out a familiar... What a wretched age we live in.”

With a sour look on his face, the old man spoke to the young apprentice standing behind him. “Don’t you agree, Faldeus?” he asked.

The man called Faldeus stood beside a tree perhaps two meters away from the old man. His voice filled with doubt, he replied, “Never mind that. More importantly, need we really be so concerned about that thing? That so-called... ‘Holy Grail War?’”

—— the Holy Grail War ——

It was a phrase often appearing in fairy tales and legends from times past. The moment that phrase left Faldeus’s lips, his teacher lowered his binoculars and spoke at him, with exhaustion apparent in his eyes. “Faldeus, is that a joke?”

“No... I meant...,” stuttered the apprentice. He lowered his gaze, as if expecting a harsh punishment.

The old man shook his head and sighed, anger entering his voice. “I did not think I would have to ask, but... just how much do you know about the Holy Grail War?”

“I did skim over the materials I was given, but...”

“Then you know enough. Be it a mere rumor among children or the ramblings of a third-rate tabloid—as long as there is some possibility, no matter how small, that an object described as a Holy Grail will come into being, we cannot afford to ignore it.”

“For it is the true desire of all magi, yet at the same time a mere means to the ultimate end.”

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Once upon a time—there was a battle.

It took place in a certain country in the Far East.

The battle took place in an ordinary town, unbeknownst to its people.

However, that battle hid a truly dreadful secret. Indeed, it was a war that brought about a miracle called the Holy Grail.

The Holy Grail.

It is an eternal miracle.

It is a legend.

It is a relic of the world of the gods.

It is a terminus.

It is hope—and so, to seek it is to admit despair.

The very identity of that object referred to as the Holy Grail changes from time to time, from place to place, and from person to person. In that war, the Holy Grail was not quite the “sacred relic” that it is often pictured to be.

There, it was said that the miracle called the Holy Grail appeared in the form of an omnipotent wish-granting device.

But it was merely *said* to be so, for at the time that the battle to claim the Grail began, the wish-granting device called the Holy Grail did not exist.

Before the Grail itself appeared, seven spirits were manifested.

From all of this world’s histories, traditions, magicks, and fictions—from every medium, “Heroes” were selected to be summoned into the present-day world as “Servants”.

They formed the fundament of the Holy Grail War, and were absolutely essential for the eventual summoning of the Holy Grail.

Those spirits, beings immeasurably stronger than humans, were called forth to destroy one another.

The magi who summoned those Heroic Spirits were known as “Masters”. In order to earn the right to obtain the Grail, a right which could devolve upon but one, they too slew one another. That carnage is precisely what is known as the Holy Grail War.

The spirits, once slain in battle, flowed into the vessel of the Holy Grail; and when that vessel was filled, the wish-granting machine was completed. That was the system underlying the Holy Grail War.

Those battlefields were perhaps the deadliest, most noxious places in the world.

The participating magi had to conceal their existence from the rest of the world, as always, and so they trod quietly through the night, letting loose the flames of battle while unseen.

As part of its mission to oversee those objects described as Holy Grails, the Church dispatched its own supervisor. The noxious battlefields gleamed with a sanguine veneer as they were cleansed by those overwhelmingly powerful spirits.

And, now—

The Holy Grail War: a battle fought five times on an island in the Far East.

Something appeared in an ordinary town in the States. That *something* was accompanied by harbingers akin to those seen in that war fought in the Far East. Rumors of that *something* spread among magi.

As a result, the Association—that organization which brings all magi together—saw fit to conduct a secret investigation of that town. And so, it came to pass that an elderly mage and his disciple were dispatched.

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“...very well. Your knowledge of the Holy Grail War is sufficient. However, Faldeus. I am unimpressed by your lackadaisical attitude. It disappoints me that you know so much about it, yet care so little. Depending on how things turn out, this could become a matter that concerns the entire Association. Were that to happen, those wretches from the Church would surely turn up. Get it together, Faldeus.”

“But is this really the place?” replied Faldeus, skeptical despite his teacher’s admonitions. “The system underlying the Holy Grail War was built by the Einzberns and the Makiri. Is it not tied to the land that the Tohsaka proffered? Could someone really have replicated their system... a full seven decades ago?”

“If this is indeed the place... ah, yes. In the worst-case scenario, it is possible that this place was built solely for the sake of the Holy Grail War.”

“It couldn’t be!”

“Calm yourself; that was just one possibility. It is said, after all, that the three founding families did anything and everything to attain the

Grail. In any case, we have yet to learn who is attempting to recreate the Holy Grail War in this town, Faldeus. It would not surprise me if the perpetrator was some relation of the Einzberns or of the Makiri. ...One of the Tohsaka is at the Clock Tower, so I doubt it is their handiwork.”

The old mage returned to his binoculars, leaving open the possibility of the founding families being involved.

It was perhaps an hour till midnight, and yet the city lights were almost as bright as ever. Snowfield stood serenely against the overcast night sky, boasting of its own existence.

After surveying the area for a few minutes, the old mage prepared to cast a spell, as if it was the only reasonable thing to be done. The spell would render his binoculars capable of viewing the ebb and flow of ley lines.

The apprentice gazed upon his master from behind, and meekly asked, “If a Holy Grail War truly does take place, surely neither we of the Association nor the devotees of the Church would keep quiet about it...?”

“Indeed... but there have only been omens thus far. Back at the Clock Tower, Lord El-Melloi said that there were irregularities in the ley lines, but.... Well, that was just a crude hypothesis on his part, to say nothing of that student of his. Hence, we are now here in this land, in order to verify El-Melloi’s predictions.”

Exhausted, the old mage chuckled.

With a mixture of irritation and scorn permeating his voice, he talked and talked at great length, perhaps at his disciple, or perhaps at himself.

“Of course, no Heroic Spirit can be summoned unless preparations for a Holy Grail have already been made. If a Heroic Spirit is indeed brought forth, our doubts will immediately be cast away... but I would prefer for that not to happen.”

“It’s a surprise to hear that coming from you, sir.”

“Speaking for myself, I very much hope that the rumors surrounding this land are nothing but. And if something does materialize here, I would like for it to be a fake Holy Grail.”

“Does that not contradict what you were saying earlier? That the Holy Grail is the true desire of all magi and a means to the ultimate end...?”

“Well... I suppose it does,” he replied, furrowing his brow. “But even if, hypothetically speaking, there is something here worthy of being called a true Holy Grail, I say confound that! It would pain me to see the Grail appear in a country with such a meager history... I am sure that many magi would do anything to reach the Root, but, to be frank, I would not. If I were to reach the Root... it would be like an ill-mannered youngling muddying up my bedchamber with his unkempt shoes. That wouldn’t do for me.” He shook his head exasperatedly.

“Is that so?”

For the umpteenth time that day, the old mage sighed at his apprentice. “In any case,” he wondered out loud, changing the topic of the conversation, “in this new land, I have to wonder... just what manner of Servants could be summoned?”

“Indeed. Leaving Assassin aside, the identities of the other five classes depend entirely on their summoners, so we truly have no way of even predicting what might happen.”

Unable to contain his aggravation with Faldeus, the mage harshly rebuked him: “If you leave Assassin aside, there are six classes remaining, you clod! It was not two minutes ago that I spoke of the seven Servants! Enough with your tomfoolery!”

Each Heroic Spirit summoned to the Holy Grail War is placed in one of seven classes.

Saber.

Archer.

Lancer.

Rider.

Caster.

Assassin.

Berserker.

The Heroic Spirits are summoned in forms that accord with their various special characteristics, thereby honing their abilities even fur-

ther. A Hero of the sword may be summoned as Saber; a Hero skilled with the spear as Lancer.

To reveal one's true name is tantamount to broadcasting one's weaknesses and special abilities; as such, Servants are typically referred to by their class names. Each class is also endowed with various skills, each able to influence combat in its own distinct way.

For example, Caster has the power of Bounded Field Creation¹, while Assassin has the ability of Presence Concealment.

In a sense, the various classes are like chess pieces, each with a distinct ability.

But each player has only one piece. The chessboard is irregular, designed for a battle royale. And every piece has the chance to control the board, provided that its mover—its Master—is strong enough.

It was this most fundamental principle of the Holy Grail War that Faldeus had bungled. His teacher lamented that he had such an unworthy disciple, but—

Faldeus remained emotionless, despite having been scolded.

He hadn't turned a deaf ear to his teacher's words, nor did it seem that he was reflecting on his indiscretions. "No, there are six classes in total, Mister Rohngall," he said, in a soft and steady voice.

"...What?"

Suddenly, a chill ran up the spine of the old mage, Rohngall.

This was the first time Faldeus had referred to him by his name.

He wanted to yell at Faldeus; to ask him what was going through his head—but Faldeus's icy glare stopped him. Rohngall remained silent.

Faldeus's emotionless visage twitched. "In the Holy Grail War waged in Japan, there certainly were seven classes," he said, coolly pointing out his teacher's mistake. "But in this city, there are only six. The Saber class—the strongest and most suited for battle—does not exist in this false Holy Grail War."

"What... are you talking about?"

Something *crunched* in his backbone.

¹結界作成能力

His Magic Circuits, his nerves, and his blood vessels all conveyed a warning signal, causing an alarm bell to ring in his ears.

His apprentice—or at least, the man who must have been his apprentice until a few minutes ago—took a step towards him. “The system created by the Makiri, Einzberns, and Tohsaka was truly amazing,” he said, in a voice bereft of emotion. “That’s why we couldn’t copy it perfectly. We would’ve liked to begin the war with an exact copy... but we used the Third Holy Grail War as our template, and that was a real mess of its own, you see. It really is a shame.”

Faldeus clearly looked as though he couldn’t be past his mid-twenties, and yet he was narrating events from over 70 years ago as if he had seen them himself.

Just when it seemed that his expression was going to turn sinister, the corners of his lips contorted, as if pulled at by invisible strings. Still as cool as ever, he spoke from the bottom of his heart.

“You referred to my nation as ‘young’¹. But that is all the more reason for you to remember, elder.”

“...What?”

“That you ought not to make light of a young nation.”

crunch crunch crik crak creak crack crik crunch

Every last one of Rohngall’s bones and muscles creaked. Perhaps it was because he was tightening his guard, or perhaps he was just outraged.

“You wretch... who... are you?”

“I’m Faldeus, of course, old chum. Of course, the only thing you *really* know about me is my name. Anyway, I really have learned quite a bit about the Association up ’till now. I suppose I ought to thank you for that.”

“.....”

¹ [sic] - the word Faldeus uses here in the original (若い) is not one that Rohngall uses in his earlier criticism of the U.S., either.

Based on his extensive experience as a mage, Rohngall knew right away that the man standing before him was no longer his apprentice; rather, he was an enemy.

Rohngall readied himself to kill Faldeus the instant that long-time acquaintance of his made a move. And yet, alarm bells continued to ring through his head.

He must have known precisely how capable a mage Faldeus was.

There were no signs that Faldeus had been concealing his strength. As an experienced spy for the Association, he could be sure of that.

At the same time, though, his experience as a spy made it clear to him that he was in a dangerous situation.

“You must be a plant, then, from another organization, sent to infiltrate the Association. And you have been one ever since you told me you sought to become a mage.”

“Another organization, eh?” With a gluey, syrupy voice, Faldeus corrected Rohngall. “The Association seems to be under the impression that a group of non-Association heterodox mages is responsible for the creation of this Holy Grail War, but.... I mean, honestly, how could... well, never mind.”

As if to indicate that there was nothing more to be said, Faldeus took a step forward.

He wasn’t particularly menacing, nor did he present himself as an enemy, but it was nonetheless clear that he was plotting something. Rohngall clenched his teeth and smoothly lowered his center of gravity, preparing himself to respond to whatever Faldeus might do.

“Do not underestimate me, child.”

As he spoke, he readied a plan to make the first move in this duel of magi—but he had already lost.

By the time they had begun trying to outwit one another as magi, Rohngall had already been defeated by the man standing before him—

“I’m not underestimating you, *sir*.”

—for Faldeus had not planned to fight him as a mage in the first place.

“I’ll hit you with everything I’ve got.”

Faldeus ignited the lighter that he was holding in one hand. A cigar suddenly appeared in his other hand, which was empty until then.

It looked like apportionment, but there were no signs that he had used any magical energy.

Seeing that Rohngall was puzzled by his actions, he grinned. It was a grin from the very core of his being, a smile of a sort that Rohngall had never seen. He went on, saying, "Haha, that was just an illusion—a trick. Not magic."

".....?"

"Ah, well, you see, we aren't really an organization of magi, specifically. I hope you aren't too disappointed," said Faldeus, without even the slightest bit of tension in his voice. He lit his cigar. "We answer to the United States of America. It just so happens that we have a few magi among our number; that's all."

Rohngall was silent for a few moments, and then he replied. "—I see. Now, pray tell, what does that cigar have to do with 'everything you've got'?"

Rohngall was trying to buy time to ready his magic. But the instant he spoke those words—

Something burst through the side of the head. Everything was decided in an instant.

It was a wet- and blubbery-sounding explosion.

The bullet decelerated as it pierced his cranium. Lead scattered everywhere, swimming in a sea of brain-fluid as it burned his mind away.

Instead of exiting through the other side of his skull, the bullet ricocheted around his brainpan, putting an instantaneous and permanent end to the old man.

And then—even though he was quite apparently dead, dozens more bullets pierced his body, as if to deliver a final blow.

The bullets were not all fired from one place. There must have been more than a dozen marksmen situated at various locations.

That was clearly overkill. What an inexorable way to destroy.

His aged limbs bent and crumpled powerlessly, like a marionette forced to dance to rap music.

“Thanks for the dance. That was pretty funny.”

Rohngall’s body sent up a red spray as it slumped to the ground, squelching. Faldeus looked at the fresh corpse and clapped slowly. “You look thirty years younger now, Mister Rohngall.”

A few minutes later—

Faldeus stood still before the body of his teacher, collapsed in a pool of its own blood.

But the forest around him had changed. There was a strange atmosphere around him.

Dozens of men clad in camouflage gear moved out of the forest from behind Faldeus.

Each one of them wore a black balaclava and held a silencer-equipped assault rifle, each engraved with a different design—rustic, yet detailed.

Their races were scarcely discernible, never mind their emotional affects. One of them straightened up and walked up to Faldeus, delivering a salute as he spoke. “Reporting in, sir. Situation is normal. We’ve found nothing out of the ordinary.”

“Good work, buddy,” replied Faldeus. Whereas his underling spoke quite formally, Faldeus’s voice was warm.

He ambled over to the corpse of the old mage, looking down at it with a weak grin on his face.

Still facing away from his subordinates, he said, “Well, then... seeing as how many of you are probably unfamiliar with these so-called ‘magi’, let me give you the rundown.”

The uniformed men had already fallen into formation behind him. In silence, they listened to Faldeus speak.

“A mage is *not* a sorceror. Don’t clutter your imaginations with fairy-tale creatures and legendary beasts. Think of... ah, that’s it—

think more along the lines of a Japanese anime or a Hollywood flick. That's all there is to them."

He squatted down before the body of what was once his teacher, grabbed a piece of it, and lifted it into the air with his bare hands.

It was a bizarre sight, but nobody so much as raised an eyebrow.

"They die when they're killed,¹ and physical attacks are reasonably effective against them. Now, there are some who cover themselves with a veil of mercury, strong enough to deflect thousands of bullets. There are others who can transfer their consciousness and extend their lives with the aid of insects embedded in their bodies. But... well, the former type has no defense against an anti-tank rifle, while the latter type almost certainly couldn't survive a precision missile strike."

They may well have figured that Faldeus was joking. The camouflaged men struggled to suppress their sniggering.

But—the moment they heard the next thing Faldeus had to say, they all fell silent.

"There are exceptions, though.... For example, this fellow, who wasn't even here in the first place."

"...could I ask you to elaborate on that, Mr. Faldeus?" inquired one of the gunmen, ever-so-formally. Faldeus cackled and tossed a piece of the corpse's flesh at him.

He caught it staidly. He looked at the piece of meat, likely part of a finger, and gasped with surprise. "...wha—?"

Under the illumination of his flashlight, it was clear that white bone protruded from the red sinews of the flesh.

But there was something wrong. Something unlike the flesh of a true human.

Transparent threads, not entirely unlike fiber optic cables, extended out of the flesh and wormily wiggled about in a most disturbing fashion.

¹ ...and that's how it should be.

"A cyborg, so to speak? Well, we call it a puppet. Mister Rohngall is a terribly cautious investigator, you see. He's not so foolish as to come all the way out here with his real body. At the moment, he's probably situated either in one of the branch chapters of the Association, or in his own atelier. I'll bet he's all in a tizzy now!"

"A puppet...? That's preposterous!"

"It is something of a spectacular technique, but do notice that he wasn't able to make it seem perfectly human. The form of an old man works well for concealing those imperfections, I suppose. I hear there's a puppetress whose dolls are utterly indistinguishable from the bodies they're modeled on... they'd even pass a DNA test." Faldeus talked and talked, sounding disinterested, as if he were an uninvolved third party.

The soldier frowned. "In that case, would he not have heard everything you said earlier?" he asked of Faldeus, his commanding officer.

"He would have. Just as planned."

"Er...?"

"I went to the trouble of gloating like a fool prior to killing him *precisely* in order to ensure that the Association would come to know of everything that I said." Faldeus stood atop the fake body, lying in a pool of fake blood, and gazed up into the dark sky as it began to drizzle. Contentedly, he murmured, "Consider this a declaration... our warning to the magi."

And that marked the beginning—

The beginning of the banquet of men and Heroic Spirits; the beginning of the false Holy Grail War.

ACT1 アーチャー



Act 1: Archer

He was truly a mage, in every respect—
Yet at the same time, he had stagnated, in every respect.

The false Holy Grail War.

He knew that it was an imitation of the ritual once carried out on an island in the Far East. That did not bother him.

——It matters not.

——Perhaps it is a sham or a counterfeit; even if it is, though, that does not matter. As long as it yields the same results as the original, it will suffice.

No proud mage would rely on the fruit's of another's labor. Such a mage would choose instead to construct a system of her own, just as the three founding families created the Holy Grail War. He, however, was quick to follow in the footsteps of others. To lead or to follow—both options were reasonable, in a sense.

From the very beginning of this mere imitation of the Holy Grail War, there were none as determined in every respect as he; none as enthusiastic than he.

From the very beginning, he was prepared for anything that might happen when he came to Snowfield.

When he first heard the rumors, he laughed them off as mere gossip. Then, a report issued by Rohngall sent tremors through the Association. News spread from mage to mage until it reached him.

He was from a family of not-insignificant repute among magi, but

his lineage's power was on the decline. As the head of his family, he was under pressure.

He had formulated his fair share of magical theories in his time. He was an intelligent man. He knew quite a few techniques. All he lacked was raw power, of the sort that should have been built up over many generations. This drove him to ever-greater frustration.

The standard thing to do in this situation would be to spend many years researching ways to increase his family's power, and then to pass that knowledge, along with his Magic Crest, on to a sufficiently-able descendant.

But he was in a hurry.

His son was even less capable of magic than he was.

There were many families whose magical natures grew weaker and weaker over time, until they completely lost touch with the world of magic.

—This is no laughing matter.

—I will *not* allow myself to fall like the Makiri.

Like any other organization or corporation, the Association was rife with obstacles.

Only a mage of a powerful bloodline could come to possess a method for producing powerful, thriving successors.

It was a catch-22. He was a mage, in every respect, and yet, it wasn't enough.

He bet everything on the perhaps-fake Holy Grail War, came to Snowfield, and put all of his chips on the table.

All of his assets, his whole past, and even his future.

—I have nothing to fear. Everything will go smoothly.

So as to demonstrate his resolve, he extirpated his son. His son, who had no future.

He did the same to his wife, who tried to stop him.

He felt nothing for her, a woman who could not bear him thriving offspring.

Even so, he found it shocking that she understood nothing of what it meant to have self-respect as a mage.

It must have been her fault that his son was lacking.

Alas, she was the best woman he could obtain with his current rank.

In order to move up in the world, he had to win this war.

Even if this Holy Grail were a counterfeit, the mere act of winning a so-called Holy Grail War would suffice to improve his standing as a mage. He could even find a path to the Root by winning this war.

Or perhaps he could learn the secrets of the Makiri and the Einzberns.

No matter what, he was bound to be in a better position by the end of this war.

What a splendid gamble that was.

At the very least, he would reap a reward more valuable than all the things he risked in entering the war.

He thought about all the various ways he could benefit from this war—but not once did he consider the possibility of his defeat, and the ensuing end of his lineage.

There was a good reason that he didn't consider the possibility.

He had a solid chance to win.

Or at least, he had a good enough chance to justify having done away with his son.

—So... these are the Command Spells, I take it?

They were a little bit different from what he had expected.

Even so, he gazed at his right hand, a loving smile stuck to his face as if he were gazing upon his own newborn child.

The seals took the form of a loop of chain, and served as proof that he had been selected as a Master in this Holy Grail War.

—But if these have appeared....

—Then the Grail has recognized me! Me! As a Master!

—As the one who shall control that Heroic Spirit!

As he spoke, the man glanced at the cloth parcel beside him—

And then, he laughed.

He laughed. He laughed. He laughed.

A grand ravine, north of Snowfield.

In the mountain chain near the ruddy cliff face, there was a system of caves.

Though the caves were originally formed by natural processes, they now served as the mage's atelier. He had established a Bounded Field to prevent others from approaching.

A lamp lit the space around the mage. He picked up the parcel and carefully and respectfully removed an object from it.

It—was a key.

It would not, however, be appropriate to describe it as a mere key.

It was exceedingly ornate, and about the length and weight of a small survival knife.

It seemed to him that the jewels that ornamented it were extremely valuable, both magically and monetarily.

—I have heard tell that *it* was summoned in a previous Holy Grail War using a fossilized snake....

—And using this relic, there is no doubt that I shall summon *it*.

Once upon a time—when his family was still powerful—one of his ancestors wagered everything, much like he had just done, to obtain that key.

What his ancestor sought was the treasury of the golden city, which was said to house all things that exist in the world. That key was the device that would open the gates deep within the city of legend.

He had no interest in material wealth. A treasury enshrining every possible magical artifact, however, was something he could not overlook.

When all was said and done, that ancestor managed to verify that the key was genuine, but made no further progress. He never found the treasury itself. The key was impregnated with some magical energy of unknown origin, but that did not matter to the mage at this point.

It was a relic belonging to the Heroic Spirit he desired. The key would serve as a superlative catalyst, all but ensuring that he would

attain the Servant he sought.

——The time has come.

——Let us begin.

The mage stood up—and his smile vanished abruptly. He set aside his emotions and his selfish desires, focusing all his attention on the ceremony he was to conduct.

He unified all his senses, focusing them to a point, and sealing off those which were unnecessary.

His nerves, his blood vessels, and the invisible Magic Circuits that ran throughout his body.

He felt a hot liquid racing through those pathways and—

The mage spoke a summoning invocation, both a felicitation of his self and a malediction against the universe.

A few minutes later.

He lost his life and everything he had sacrificed for this war.

The lineage of magi to which he belonged had met its end.

It all happened in a split-second. A mere split-second.

Following a battle of a mere few seconds, he met his end, just like that.

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“I did it.... Ha ha, ha ha ha ha ha! I did it!”

When the mage saw *it* appear before him, he could not remain silent.

There was no need for him to ascertain the being’s true name.

From the very beginning, he knew what he would summon.

He just barely managed to suppress a roar of joyous laughter. For a few seconds, he just stood there, ignoring the Heroic Spirit.

The Heroic Spirit’s countenance was tinged with clear and obvious displeasure. Nonetheless, he carried out his duty as a Heroic Spirit. Of course, there’s no telling whether or not he conceived of it as a “duty” in the first place.

“...Answer me. Are you the insolent mage that dares make an entreaty to a king in all his radiance?”

He had golden hair and golden armor.

As a Servant, he was defined by his unparalleled magnificence. His query to the mage was laced with contempt.

The mage was dismayed when he heard the Servant’s question. Even though he could sense the sheer overwhelming power of the being before him, he felt a twinge of anger.

——How dare a mere Servant be so impertinent!

His pride as a mage won over his trepidation. However, an ache in the Command Spells on his right hand brought him back from the brink of rage.

——...So be it. Given this Hero’s personality, I should expect as much.

Right at the outset, he would have to make their relationship clear.

In this war, he would be in charge. The Heroic Spirit he had summoned as a Servant was merely a tool of his.

——Yes. It is so. I am your master.

He prepared to complete his response to the Servant’s query, extending his right hand forward to display his Command Spells—

Whereupon he realized that his right hand had gone missing.

“...Huh? Wha?”

He was at a loss for words. His stammers echoed throughout the cavern.

Though not a drop of blood had fallen from his body, his right hand was clearly gone.

Panicking, he lifted his wrist up to his face. The sharp odor of burnt flesh filled his nasal cavity.

Faint wisps of smoke were rising from the stump of his wrist. Clearly, his hand had been cut off with some sort of flame.

The moment he became consciously aware of that, a surge of pain shot through his nervous system and—

“HiII gAA- giIIIIII gaAAAAAaAAAAaaA! AAaaaAAAAaaaaaaa!”

A scream—a scream—an overpowering scream.

He shrieked at the top of his lungs, sounding like some kind of enormous insect. Noticing this, the Heroic Spirit, sounding bored, said, “So, you are a jester, knave? If that be so, amuse me with more elegant screams. This will not suffice.”

The Servant didn’t even lift an eyebrow, prideful as always. It would seem that he was not responsible for the disappearance of the mage’s right hand.

“HiaAAA, Hyaa, hiiIIAaaAAAAa!”

In the face of this incomprehensible happening, the mage was about to lose control of himself—but as a mage, he could not allow that to happen. He forced himself to calm down, and quickly composed himself.

——There is someone... within the Bounded Field!

——How could I allow this to occur? How injudicious of me!

Under normal circumstances, he could have sensed any intruder the moment they entered these caves, since he had made them into his atelier. However, he had let his guard down while he was focused on summoning his Servant. The intruder could have snuck in unnoticed while the caves brimmed with the Heroic Spirit’s magical energy.

Even so, there were other traps set up to support the Bounded Field. None of the traps had been activated. If the intruder had managed to deactivate every trap that stood in their way, the mage would have to be quite cautious in dealing with them. That much was clear to him.

As he magically reconstituted what remained of his right hand, he faced towards the presence he now sensed—towards the tunnel that led out of the cave—and bellowed, “Who are you?! How did you get past my Bounded Field?!”

And then—a response came right away, sounding forth from the darkness of the cave.

However, the response was not to the mage, but rather to the golden Servant: “O mighty king, Your humble servant begs permission to present herself before You.”

The Servant thought for a second and then replied, haughtily, “Very well. I shall grant you leave to witness my glory.”

“...I am most grateful for this privilege, Your Majesty.” Her voice was clear—immaculate, even. It was devoid of emotion, as if it rejected all that was.

She emerged from the shadow of a boulder—and though her voice alone left the impression that she was young, she was even younger than her voice suggested—perhaps twelve years old. Her skin was dark brown, and her hair was a lustrous black.

Clad in the elegant beauty of her ceremonial garment, decorous in every way, she was as a child of noble upbringing. Though her face was pulchritudinous, accentuated further by her dress, the expression she bore was somewhat less resplendent.

She humbly took a step into the atelier and bowed deeply before the altar atop which the Heroic Spirit stood. Then, unconcerned about the dirt on the ground, she fell to her knees.

“Wha...” The mage choked back a cry of rage. Unable even to discern how strong the girl was, he could not afford to act rashly. Meanwhile, the girl paid the mage no heed.

The Heroic Spirit was unsurprised by the girl’s deferential posture. He looked down at her and spoke, with great power underlying each word. “You have done well not to spill the blood of a mongrel in my presence. However, the air is now filled with a most indelectable stench of flesh. If you wish to render unto me an explanation for this indiscretion, do so now.”

The girl briefly glanced at the mage.

“I beg Your forgiveness, Your Majesty. I thought it fitting to render retribution unto that thief for having stolen the key to Your treasury, as he was unworthy of facing justice at Your hands,” she replied, still kneeling.

As she spoke, she brought forth a piece of human flesh.

It had, for sure, been part of the mage’s body, and it was magically connected to the Heroic Spirit by virtue of the Command Spells inscribed upon on it. It was, in other words, the mage’s right hand.

The golden Heroic Spirit nodded at the girl's response. He looked down and saw the key, placed on a pedestal by his feet. He picked it up—and then tossed it away, disinterestedly.

"This key is a trifle. There lives not a single man in the entirety of my garden who would dare lay a hand upon my treasures. Though I did order that this key be created, I did not need it, and so I did away with it."

"...?!"

The mage had been speaking an incantation to numb the pain in his right wrist. When he heard the Heroic Spirit's statement, he was shocked.

One of his ancestors had staked everything on the hopes of attaining the key to that treasury.

That artifact, his family's one and only pride, had been tossed away like a piece of filth. And that too, by his Servant, a being who should have been his slave; his tool.

Overcome with rage, the pain in his right arm grew dull, even as he stopped chanting the incantation.

However—as if to deliver a fatal wound to the mage, the brown-skinned girl turned to look at him, and spoke at him in an intimidating voice. "If His Majesty wishes that it be so, I shall do no further battle with you. I ask that you depart now." Her voice dripped with pathos.

"Wha..."

"If you do so, I will not have to slay you."

"———." The mage lost control of himself.

The fury that had welled up within him took control of his Magic Circuits. He did not even have the capacity to speak. Hysterically, he released all the magical energy stored in his left hand.

He put all of his magic, his madness, his might into a sphere of black light, and flung it at the girl with all his strength. It soared towards her, tearing through space, ready to consume her whole—it blitzed; it surged; it raced.

The girl should have been destroyed by his burst of magical energy before she could take another breath.

But that didn't happen.

“()”

A silent chant.

As her lips moved, magic began to take form around her.

Almost immediately, immense magical energy erupted between her and the mage.

It was like a spell that had been compressed so far that it became soundless—a chant of overwhelming power.

And at the very end—the mage saw it.

An enormous firey maw, perhaps twice as tall as him, appeared in front of her and drank down the magical energy he had released, and then—

—That cannot be.

That was the last thing he ever thought.

In the end, what was it that could not be? He did not even have time to contemplate that.

—Th-that can't... ca-cannot... that... c-can't be.

As a mage, he would have liked to think that even if he were to die, his lineage would live on... but then, he recalled that it was a mere few days prior that he had slain his would-be successor with his own hands.

—It can't be! It cannot! I... I will... die? Here? That c-cannot....

—That cannot cannot cann—————

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And then, the mage vanished.

He lost his life and everything he had sacrificed for this war.

The lineage of magi to which he belonged had met its end.

It all happened in a split-second. A mere split-second.

Following a battle of a mere few seconds, he was swallowed up by those flames. He met his end, just like that

“I beg Your forgiveness for having subjected You to such an un-seemly sight, Your Majesty.”

She had just killed a man, but she was not flustered. She bowed her head before the Heroic Spirit.

The golden Servant looked upon her so as to say that it did not matter to him. Then, in reference to the magic the girl had used, he said, “I see. So your people have ruled this land in my absence.”

The magic she had just used did not originate within her self.

Rather, it was likely that she had exploited the ley lines of the land.

In acknowledgement of that fact, emotion flitted across the girl’s face for the first time. Her head still bowed low, she wistfully replied, “We have not ruled it. Rather, we have lived in harmony with it. ...Just as Your Majesty surmised, my people are but mere commoners once outside Snowfield.”

“A mongrel shall never be anything but a mongrel. Those with magic are no different than those without.”

His arrogance suggested that he believed all things save for himself to be alike. The girl did not reply.

The Command Spells that had been on the mage’s right hand had already migrated to her own right hand.

Magical energy now flowed into the Heroic Spirit’s being not from the mage, but from the girl. As he observed this, he spoke as imposingly as ever—somehow bored, but at the same time infinitely majestic. “Very well. Once again, answer me. Are you the insolent mage that dares make an entreaty to a king in all his radiance?”

The golden Heroic Spirit.

The greatest of all Heroes. The man said to be the king of all kings—

The girl gave a firm nod, and bowed down before him once again.

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“...I do not seek the Holy Grail,” said the girl quietly, as they made their way out of the cave.

She had identified herself to be Tiné Chelc. As the Master of the golden Servant, she was now a participant in the Holy Grail War.

And yet, she had made the contradictory declaration that she did not desire the Holy Grail. Elaborating on her true goals, she said, “We wish to drive out the magi who selected this place as the site of their Holy Grail War, who have run roughshod over this land. Such is the extent of our desire, Your Majesty.”

She declared her desire to destroy the Holy Grail War without the least hint of gravitas. The golden Heroic Spirit—the king summoned into this age as a Servant of the Archer class—disinterestedly replied, “I do not care for the Grail either. If it is the true Grail, I shall punish the knaves who stole my treasure; and if it is a false Grail, I shall execute the ingrates who performed this ritual.”

“Your gracious words reassure me, Your Majesty,” she thanked him. Continuing on, she spoke of her people: “For a thousand years, my tribe has lived in harmony with the land on which Snowfield was built. We even protected it against the tyrants from the east who sought to rule this place. But then, a sect in their government joined forces with those wretched magi... and in a mere seventy years, they overran this land.” Her voice was thick with a mixture of rage and sadness.

But the Heroic Spirit did not seem to care. “What rot. It matters not which mongrel reigns supreme over this mongrel land, for it is a part of my garden, and shall in the end return to me. Ordinarily, I would not deign to interpose in a squabble among mongrels... but if they dare lay their hands on my treasures, that would be a different matter.”

As always, he thought only about himself. And what did the girl make of that?

She did not find it terribly unpleasant, nor was it particularly surprising.

He conducted himself as a king at all times, and so none could question his kingship.

His indomitability inspired a twinge of something like envy in her. She composed herself and stepped out of the cave.

Outside the cave, perhaps a hundred people in black garments stood at attention, awaiting her return.

The majority of them were brown-skinned, just like her, but there were also a few white- and black-skinned people among them.

They had driven a fleet of vehicles to the lip of the valley and encircled the entrance to the cave. Clearly, they were not there to do an honest day's work.

They laid eyes upon the girl and the imposing man beside her and—

In unison, they reverently knelt before the girl and the Heroic Spirit.

“Who are these knaves?”

Tiné, too, knelt before him before replying. “...They are but the members of the society that seeks to revive our tribe and defeat the magi that have descended upon the city, Your Majesty. I have succeeded my father as the society's representative. And so, I must fight in this war.”

“Oh?”

Many people knelt before him in veneration. Perhaps it reminded him of how things had been when he was alive. His eyes faintly narrowed as he ever-so-slightly acknowledged her.

“Mongrels though you may be, you seem to understand who is worthy of your worship.”

“We would not dare to meet Your Majesty's splendor with anything but the deepest gratitude.”

“So, you wish to make use of my might for your ends. It seems that you have prepared adequately for the forthcoming battle.”

“.....”

She knew she was supposed to be honored by that comment, and yet she was uneasy.

The king was very clearly bored, and took no pains to hide it.

And right away, as if to confirm her suspicions, the Heroic Spirit spoke: “But this grail is, after all, a false one. The other rabble who

That tremendous rumbling noise, which laid waste to the very laws of physics, was, for some reason, something Tiné had faith in.

It was like the first cry of a newborn, and at the same time—

It was almost certainly the voice of a stupendously powerful Servant.

Archer, too, stood motionless upon hearing that voice.

The bottle he had conjured was at his lips. He had been about to drink, when he stopped—and it was then that the golden king displayed a powerful emotion for the first time.

Even those who had known Archer for some time would say that it was rare to see him so emotional. That king among all kings was quick to anger, and by no means level-headed—but to think that even he could be brought to this state.

“That voice... could it be?”

His eyes lit up with surprise, consternation, bewilderment—and then, exhilaration.

“...Is it you?”

Tiné noticed that the the Heroic Spirit’s powerful aura wavered for a mere instant as he whispered those words.

But, without a moment’s hesitation, Archer exuded arrogance once again, overbearing as always. He burst into a fit of earnest laughter. The sound of his jubilant voice penetrated the vast sky, higher and ever higher.

And then, after he had had his fill of laughter—

“Ha! What fortune! What am I to call a happenstance of this sort if not proof of my kingship?!”

He swelled with delight and vigor, as though he had not been bored just a few moments earlier.

“Rejoice, mongrel girl! It seems that I shall have occasion to use the full force of my abilities in this war!”

The king of heroes was uncharacteristically talkative, perhaps because he was awash in joy.

“What a pleasure it would be to end it all in a duel on yonder plaza.... But then again, if he has been summoned as a mad warrior, or if.... No; I shall not speak of it. This is not a matter that the mongrels ought hear of.”

He was in a pleasant mood, unable to stifle his laughter, as kingly as ever. As he stared in the direction from which the roar came, he spoke to Tiné, who still knelt beside him.

“Look upon me, Tiné.”

Shocked that the Heroic Spirit would refer to her by name, Tiné raised her head to look up at him.

The king tossed her the bottle he had been holding.

“It is an elixir of youth. I imagine you have no need for it at your age, but now that it has come to this, I do not need it, either. Be grateful.”

“Y-yes...? Yes, Your Majesty!” Her eyes were wide with surprise.

Archer glanced at her for a moment before going on. “If you wish to become my subject, I shall command you thus,” he said, majestically. Though he paid little attention to her, Archer was in high spirits as he delivered his kingly order. “You are but a mere child. Act as one. Until you learn the ways of the world, it will suffice for you to gaze upon my kingly might with jubilation.” Though there was a touch of sarcasm in his words, they were nonetheless powerful.

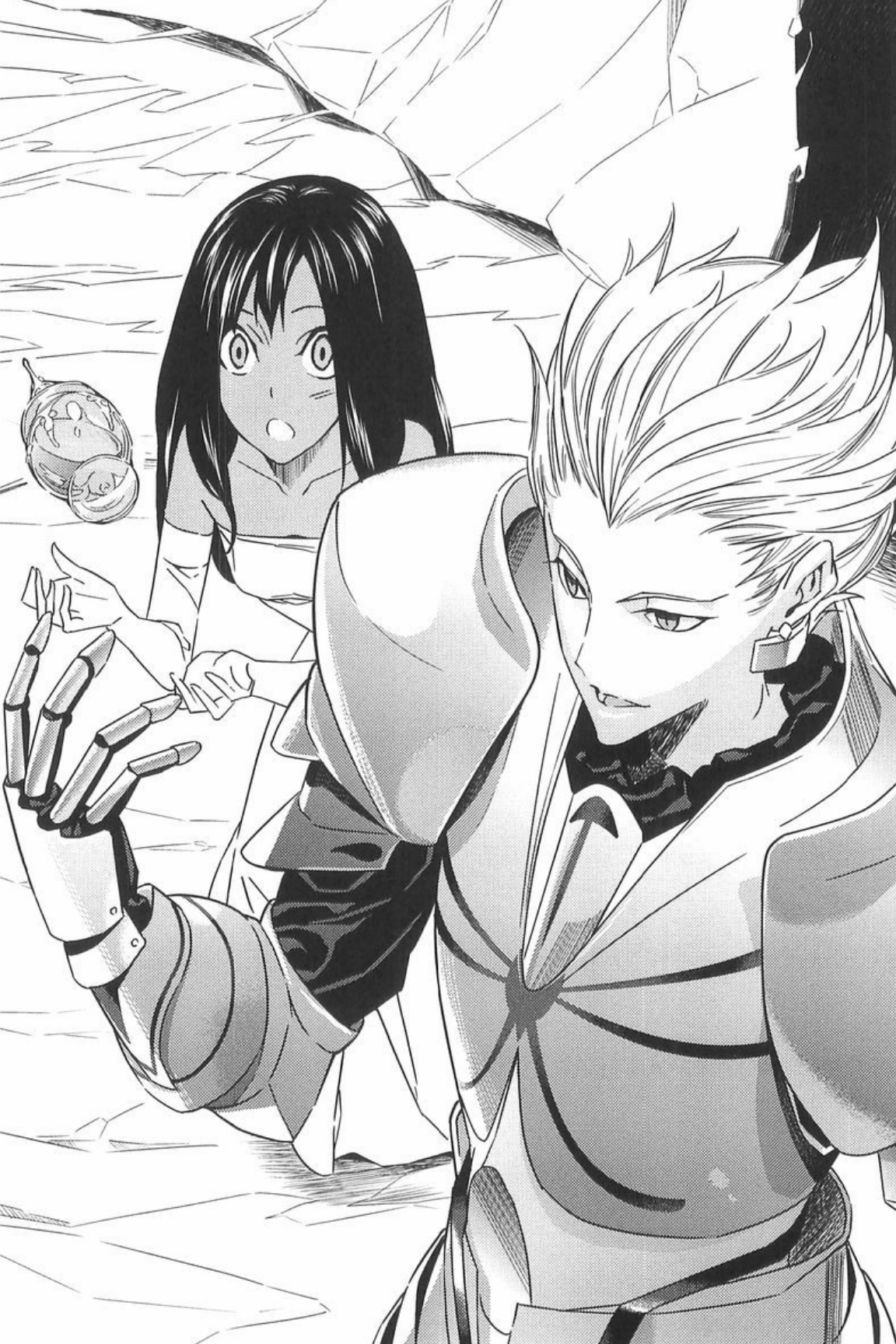
She had discarded all her emotions for the sake of her tribe, and yet, when faced with his words, she faltered.

Indeed, *because* she had discarded her emotions, she could do nothing but display her utmost respect to him. She was unable to jubilate, and so hung her head.

“I shall attempt to do so, Your Majesty,” she said, apologetically.

And so—with that, one Servant and his Master had stepped onto the battlefield.

Gilgamesh, the King of Heroes, along with the girl whose land had been stolen.



Though they knew that this Holy Grail War was a fake, they pressed on, wagering everything they had.

From that moment on, the king and the girl reigned supreme.

They would fight—to replace the lies of this war with their own truths.

The king's battle had begun.

ACT2 バーサーカー



Act 2: Berserker

England — somewhere in London

The Clock Tower.

For most, that term refers to a popular tourist destination in London.

For magi, however, it means something else altogether.

It is the headquarters of the Association, which brings countless many magi together, and at the same time, is the finest educational institution for the training of young magi.

It could well be said to be the Vatican of magic. For as long as England has existed, it has produced first-class mage after first-class mage, each of whom has gone on to elevate the art of magic to a new level.

“Fuck...”

A word unbecoming of that austere institution resounded through the halls.

“You know what you are? In a word, you’re an imbecile,” said a man in his early thirties, remonstrating the youngster facing him. His long hair fluttered in the breeze as he swore.

He wore a red coat with golden ornamentations on its shoulders, and his face bore a tremendously sour expression.

But that youngster desperately replied—

“Oh, come on! At least describe me with three words!”

—with a response that was just a bit off.

“You’re a cretin and an imbecile. There are no other words to describe you.”

The youngster stood his ground, unintimidated by the stern man.

“But I really, really want to participate, professor! I’ve got to go to the States for the Holy Grail War!”

“For fuck’s sake! Don’t bloody go around yelling about that in the hallways! You incorrigible imbecile! Damn it all... where did you hear of it? It’s not a top-secret matter, but it certainly isn’t something a rotten little whippersnapper ought to know about!” The professor gave the clingy youngster a piece of his mind, having checked to make sure that there was nobody in the vicinity.

He was an instructor at the Association, the finest educational institution in the magical world, and was known to all as Lord El-Melloi II. Apparently, that wasn’t his real name, but everyone who knew him referred to him as Lord El-Melloi II out of respect.

Though he was still young, he was said to be the finest lecturer in the Clock Tower. Every student who had taken a course taught by him had gone on to become a first-rate mage. His students became famous among magi the world around for their exploits.

As such, he earned the respect of many magi, who bestowed upon him various nicknames, such as “Professor Charisma”, “Master V”, and “Great Big Ben ☆ London Star”.

He had no great exploits to his own name, however, and did seem a bit irritated that his students were stealing the spotlight.

But for now, what was irritating him was specifically the young man standing before him, who was also one of his students.

In response to his professor’s question about the Holy Grail War, the youngster nonchalantly replied, “Yesterday, some professors and administrators from the Association were holding a council meeting in one of the basement lecture halls, right? You know that famous puppetmaster, Mr. Rohngall? That was the first time I actually saw him in the flesh!”

Upon hearing his student’s reply, El-Melloi’s expression turned

indistinct, perhaps with infuriation. He applied a claw hold to his student's face and hissed, "Why—the—*fuck*—do you know what happened in that meeting?"

"I was a bit curious, so I eavesdropped!"

"That was a top-secret meeting, you twit! They must've set up dozens of Bounded Fields!"

He averted his eyes. "Er, well, see, I know I shouldn't have, but I was really, reaaaally curious..." he replied, apologetically.

"So I figured, why not try hacking into the room's own Bounded Field? And what do you know, it worked!"

—silence.

The use of the word "hacking" among magi was not a peculiarity of his: its use was in fact rather prevalent among younger magi. His actual actions likely had nothing to do with hacking or cracking; presumably, he meant that he had bypassed the Bounded Field unnoticed, snuck into the meeting, and eavesdropped.

Flatt Escardos.

He was the most senior of Lord El-Melloi II's students.

Though he entered El-Melloi's tutelage as a young man, he subsequently spent many years in the Clock Tower, unable to graduate.

To describe him in a single word, only El-Melloi's terms of abuse would really be appropriate.

Using a few more words, however, it would be fair to describe him as a man with boundless magical potential and talent. A man who, however, critically lacks the ability to put that talent to any good use.

He was the eldest son of the Escardos line, a family that lived on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. It was hoped that Flatt would be a mage who had Magic Circuits the likes of which are rarely seen, along with the talent necessary to control them, but—

Alas, his magical talent was for naught, since he lacked the stern disposition that is necessary for all magi.

At first, he was hailed as a prodigy and studied under a number of other professors. Eventually, though, all of them started bellyaching about Flatt, and so in the end, he was assigned to Lord El-Melloi II, for there was nobody else available.

Years passed. As Flatt's magical talents developed, he came to surpass all the other students. Other professors were unable to achieve the same results with their students. This was a good sign for Master V's reputation.

That said, Flatt had too many other problems, and so was still yet to graduate from the Clock Tower.

Usually, Lord El-Melloi II would refuse to overlook a student's weak points, unwilling to send an underprepared mage out into the world. But this time and only this time, he had begun to regret having made that choice.

"A talented idiot is the most dangerous kind of idiot..." said Master V, calmly.

Master V had moved past anger. He had achieved a sort of ascetic enlightenment. That said, he looked as sullen as usual. He whacked his student and said, "I'll pretend I never heard any of this. Now quit harassing me about this."

"I won't be a bother, professor! I just, you know, I need some kind of item to summon a hero, right?! I don't know how I'm supposed to find one of those! Like, if I had a portrait of Napoleon, could I summon Napoleon?! An emperor would be the coolest thing!"

"If I were the Heroic Spirit Napoleon, I'd rather have you face the firing squad than make a contract with you!"

El-Melloi thought about making a break for it, but he decided against it. Instead, perhaps because something about the Holy Grail War had come to mind, he asked Flatt a serious question. "...Flatt, you know, you're.... why do you want the Holy Grail? I can't imagine that you take magic so seriously that you'd want to reach the Root. Knowing you, I have to ask—you aren't planning on wishing to graduate, or wishing to peeve me off as comeuppance for not letting you graduate,

or anything *that* stupid, right?”

El-Melloi was completely unprepared for Flatt’s response.

“Because I want to see it!”

“...what?”

“I mean, it’d be so super-cool! It’s the Holy Grail! Hitler and Gobbles wanted it for the Third Reich! And Shi Huangdi and Nobunaga and Godzilla all looked for it too! If it really exists, I’ve just gotta see what it looks like!”

“His name was Goebbels, not Gobbles. Godzilla never looked for it. I don’t know about Nobunaga or Shi Huangdi, but historically and culturally speaking, that just doesn’t seem right.” El-Melloi corrected Flatt on the points that didn’t matter, but stayed otherwise silent.

Flatt waited a while for his professor to respond, expecting to be thoroughly scolded. Eventually, El-Melloi sighed, and calmly and kindly said, “Do you understand what a war of mage against mage really entails? You might well experience things worse than death, and end up being killed gruesomely, not having accomplished anything.”

“And people who know that still look for the Grail, right? Now I want to see it even more!”

El-Melloi was about to yell at him, telling him to think about it more—

—but even if he *did* think about it more, this moron would probably end up saying the same thing.

Having arrived at this conclusion, he decided to question Flatt from a different angle.

“Well, tell me this: do you have what it takes to kill somebody for the Grail?”

“Uh.... What if I could win without killing people... like, we could play chess, or...”

“Brilliant! If your opponent happens to be the World Chess Champion, that just might work! Hell, maybe you could even have a chess-boxing match!”

“...This is a tricky problem, huh. I really, really want to see the other Heroes... and if it works out, I want to make friends with them! If I

made friends with six Heroes, I'd be an awesome mage! We could even conquer the world!"

El-Melloi remained silent. He had figured that Flatt had completely lost track of his initial question somewhere along the way.

He wasn't planning to admonish Flatt, nor was he particularly surprised by Flatt's ramblings.

He put his hand to his chin, and seemed to be thinking about something for a while—

And eventually, he snapped back to reality, and said, "...that's not happening." He flatly put a stop to Flatt's fantasies.

"Yeah, yeah, well, I'm counting on you, professor! Or, should I say, Great Big Ben ☆ London Star!"

"Don't call me that to my face! And honestly, why did you have to pick *that* nickname!? You're making fun of me, aren't you? You *are* making fun of me, you clod!"

"Well, don't worry! I'll think up a new nickname for you. It'll be perfect! Like, um, how about 'Magical Miniskirt Professor'¹!?"

"Fuck off and die!"

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In the end, Flatt clearly looked miserable after having been dealt with so coldly by El-Melloi. He wandered around the academic wing of the Clock Tower. He walked down a long corridor, humphing in a manner unbefitting a man nearly 20 years of age.

And then—

"Ah, good to see you there." A woman called out to him from down the hallway.

She was one of the administrative personnel of the Clock Tower. In her hands, she held a large box and a small bundle.

"These packages are for your professor. Could you pass them onto him?"

¹絶対領域マジシャン先生

And so, she thrust the two packages into Flatt's hands. Now, he would have to hand these over to Master V, but—

——Aw, man, I bet he's still mad.

Flatt thought negative thoughts as he headed back up the hallway, whereupon he was overcome by curiosity about the contents of the box. He used clairvoyance magic to examine its contents.

He saw a small knife with a sinister-looking design on it, probably designed for ceremonial use.

And then, with his keen powers of clairvoyance, he saw a name inscribed on the blade. An electric sensation shot through his body.

——Could it be...!

——Professor...! **You got it for me!?**

Taken in by his own misinterpretation, he set off at a run, carrying the box with him.

There were a number of symbols on the inside of the box, but they weren't written in any script he could read. Presumably, they were magical instructions from some other country or somesuch.

He could figure out how to interpret those instructions at some other time. For now, he had one goal: to get to the center of the academic wing, as quickly as possible.

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"Son of a fuck... he's back *again*?" Lord El-Melloi II was clearly not pleased when he saw a certain someone sprinting down the hallway towards him. Strangely, though, when Flatt caught up to him, with a small package in his hand, he started babbling about things that had nothing to do with the Holy Grail War.

"Pr... professor... you... g... got... this... this thing... for... me!" gasped Flatt, as he showed the parcel to his professor. Having run a hundred meters at a breakneck pace, Flatt had run out of breath quite quickly.

El-Melloi looked at the parcel, unsure at first what it actually was. When he saw the address and logo printed on the exterior, he realized what it was and nodded. "So, you... what, do you want this?"

Flatt nodded his head furiously, like he was some kind of head-banger.

“Well, alright. If you want it, you can have it. I didn’t need it anyway.”

Hearing his professor’s response, Flatt glowed with happiness—the greatest joy of his life thus far.

“Thank you so much! I mean, really, thank you so very much! I’m so glad I’m *your* student, prof!” He dashed off, almost tearful with joy.

“Damn. When I was his age, I was everything he isn’t. I bet he used clairvoyance to look inside it.... What was in there that he wanted so much?” El-Melloi muttered under his breath, exasperated.

A few minutes later—

El-Melloi II had returned to his room. As he thought about his incompetent pupil, a cabinet caught his eye.

It was a double lock, with both a physical component and a magical one. El-Melloi carefully undid the locks and picked up the object inside the cabinet.

It was a peculiar-looking protective case, in which rested a piece of cloth.

From the looks of it, it was an antique. It was decaying, and had no apparent use.

However, given that it was the most carefully-secured object in the room, it was evident that it was no mere raggedy scrap of fabric.

“Take the other Servants as your subjects and conquer the world, huh...” Thinking back on Flatt’s ramblings, he frowned and scowled.

“If I couldn’t stop him, I was considering letting him have this... but I’m glad it didn’t come to that.”

Still frowning, El-Melloi II sighed in relief and put the lid back on the case. He thought about the parcel he had let Flatt have.

“I suppose I’m in no position to talk, but they really should rethink that system of having students courier other people’s mail. Not that it was a particularly important piece of mail.”

“Well, anyway, if that’ll get him to forget about the Holy Grail War, that’s a good thing.”

A few months earlier—

El-Melloi had been enjoying some Japanese video games in the privacy of his room. Every time he finished playing a game, he filled out the survey card that had been included in the game box and jotted down his impressions of the game. It was just the proper thing to do.

Of course, he had to pay international postage to have the cards airmailed back to Japan, but he did so nonetheless. Thanks to that, he had been entered into a number of sweepstakes, and so his room was filled with all sorts of game merchandise.

That’s not to say that he filled out the surveys just to get merchandise. To the contrary, he had little interest in most of the products he received. He really did just want to relay his opinions back to the game designers.

And then, a few months after that—

If there was any merchandise El-Melloi really did want, he would just order it directly. When he saw the sender’s name—that of a Japanese company—on the package Flatt had brought to him, he figured that it was just another piece of bonus merchandise. And so, he didn’t even bother to open it before letting Flatt have it.

Just as El-Melloi suspected, it was nothing more than a piece of game merchandise.

Judging from the company’s name, he figured it was an action figure from some sort of game about robots or something of that ilk, but—

In actuality, it was from a simulation game called “Night Wars of the British Empire”.

And as for what that piece of merchandise was——

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A few days later — the City of Snowfield — Center Park

The sun shone brightly, hanging high in the midday sky.

Flatt had hopped on a plane to America post-haste. Of course, he was thoroughly unprepared for the journey.

He had a vague idea of how the Holy Grail War worked, but he was clueless about the specifics.

Ah, Flatt—a man who had more important things to worry about than the Holy Grail War—

And a man who gazed at the sigils on his right hand with glee.

“These are... so... *awesome!* If I use these... Command Spell-thingums... will they disappear?”

He rubbed his hand over and over again. Every so often, he would mumble something—and then, his shoulders would droop. It was as though he was heartbroken.

“It’s like they’re gonna vanish. I’ve got it! I absolutely won’t use my Command Spells, no matter what!”

Apparently, Flatt had somehow figured out that Command Spells disappear after being used. If anybody else with knowledge of the Holy Grail War had been in the park at that time, they surely would have apprehended Flatt then and there and taken him in for interrogation.

Luckily for him, the only people in the park were ordinary people—mostly children with their parents.

Flatt stared at his Command Spells for a while longer. Eventually, he opened the cloth parcel he had been holding.

From it, he removed a knife.

It was a dastardly-looking knife, tinged in red and black, and was, all in all, rather crass.

Even though it was still sheathed, its blade was nonetheless bizarrely lustrous—elegantly so, even.

“Man oh man, thank goodness for Master V. I mean, sure, he was beating around the bush, but he had this awesome relic all ready and waiting for me!”

Flatt still hadn't realized that a mix-up had happened. Looking at the knife with his own eyes did not dissuade him. Rather, it left him more confident than ever in the verity of the knife, and it spurred him onwards, bringing him all the way to the States.

And then—imagine!—the Holy Grail had selected him to participate in the war, and had endowed him with Command Spells for that purpose.

He stared alternately at his Command Spells and his knife—and every so often, he mumbled something.

Perhaps thirty minutes had passed, when—

A shocking scene unfolded in the park—and had any other Masters known about it, they surely would have fainted from the shock of it.

To be frank, it was miraculous. If his teacher, El-Melloi II, had been there to witness it, he would likely have praised Flatt. Of course, he would have been furious while doing so. And he would have kneed Flatt in the unmentionables a few times first.

Was it a miracle? Or was it a mere stroke of luck—or perhaps, something achieved by Flatt's own latent talents? Either way, in a certain sense, Flatt had delivered a powerful slight against the false Holy Grail War.

Of course, the only one who was aware of this was Flatt himself.

[I ask of thee: art thou the Master who hath summoned me?]

"I... wha!?"

Upon hearing that frighteningly crisp voice, Flatt leapt out of his seat and looked around for the speaker.

As before, though, all he could see were families and couples walking about. Whoever it was that had spoken was nowhere to be seen.

["Aye," say ye? I shall take that as an affirmative. Our contract is complete. As partners in search of the Holy Grail, let us be jolly chums.]

"Huh? Huuuh!?"

Flatt furiously gyrated his neck in all directions, but still could not find anybody who seemed like the one who had just been speaking.

Perhaps witnessing the young man in a panic, the voice continued on.

[By the stars... you have summoned me before the eyes of the public, and without an altar at that! Quite some pluck you have there, O Master of mine.... Hold it right there.... If you did not use an altar, did you neither speak the summoning incantation!?!]

“Uh, um... sorry, there was a lot of magical energy flying around, and I was kind of fiddling with it... and I guess we linked up. Man, I’m really sorry about summoning you this way.”

[I see... Well, that is quite alright—in fact, it speaks volumes about your excellence as a mage.]

Apparently, the voice of that Servant-ish being was being transmitted straight into Flatt’s head.

He soon realized that magical energy was flowing through his Command Spells and going... somewhere. Rather shyly, he started talking to the voice in his head. “Er, erm... I guess this isn’t really the, um, the right time to ask, but... are Servants always like this?”

[Not at all, lad. I am a special case. Don’t let it bother you.] The Servant’s voice was friendlier than Flatt had imagined, and it was quite refined and polite, to boot. Oddly enough, he was unable to get any idea as to what, specifically, the Servant’s identity might be.

[In any case, I do not really have a definite “identity”, so to speak. You could say that my appearance and manner are of all varieties—but then again, perhaps you could not. It is that sort of thing.]

Upon hearing any ordinary voice, one can typically tell if the speaker is a man or a woman; or if the speaker is old or young; or maybe even what the speaker’s occupation is. Something about the voice is bound to give away those details. But this voice, which was transmitted directly into Flatt’s head, was devoid of any special characteristics. It was like he was speaking to a headless monster.

“So, um... could you tell me what your name is?”

A casual question.

If the knife in his hand was what it seemed to be, the Servant would surely be just what he expected.

And yet, Flatt was unable to reconcile his impression of a “Heroic Spirit (?)” with the voice inside his head.

This made sense, since he knew that his image of a “Heroic Spirit (?)” did not precisely accord with the class of beings called “Heroes”.

But, well—in any country where British films and novels were popular, there couldn’t be many who hadn’t heard of that Servant. Granted, in terms of notoriety, he wasn’t quite on par with Sherlock Holmes or Arsène Lupin, but—unlike those two, he had really existed, once upon a time.

For some reason, the Servant remained silent. Flatt nervously looked around, but—

Suddenly, a man of large build, dressed in shades of black, entered his field of view.

“Boy oh boy! You finally manifested!”

“I *what*? What in tarnation’re you talkin’ about, boy?” The man in black looked at Flatt suspiciously.

Flatt yelped, and his face turned a ghastly shade of white.

Of course the man would be wearing black.

He was a policeman, with a handgun holstered at his hip. He peered down at Flatt—a man sitting on a bench in front of a fountain in the middle of the day with a knife in his hand.

“What in blazes are you doin’ yammerin’ to yourself, son? And what’s that there knife for? You’re acting mighty suspicious.”

“N-no! I mean! This isn’t!”

Flatt was rattled. He tried to explain what he was doing, when—

“Did that surprise you?”

Suddenly, the police officer began to act in a kind manner. He handed his truncheon to Flatt.

It *felt* like a real truncheon—but the moment he grasped it, it vanished into thin air.

Surprised, he looked up from his hand, only to find a conspicuous lack of a police officer. In the officer’s stead, he saw a woman dressed

in a positively lascivious dress.

And then, the woman spoke to him. “I thought I might demonstrate my specialty to you before introducing myself.” The voice, though certainly feminine, had the same feel to it as the voice that had been in his head just a little while prior.

“Huh? Huh? What!?” Flatt grew more and more surprised.

Then, the woman disappeared from before his very eyes and—

[I apologize for startling you, Master. I thought this way might be faster.]

The voice was in his head again.

Some of the nearby families seemed to have noticed that something was off. Some rubbed at their eyes while others cocked their heads, and a few children even asked their parents why the police officer turned into a woman and then vanished. Of course, their questions were met with laughter.

Given what they had seen, and given that the imprint left in the ground by the woman’s high heels remained, they could be certain that what they had just seen was no hallucination.

The truth was not for the ordinary people who looked on with suspicion—only within Flatt’s mind would it be revealed.

[Allow me to introduce myself once again. My true name is—]

Flatt waited for him to continue, with bated breath.

He knew what his Servant’s true form was. However, in the legend in which he appeared, the Servant’s true *name* was far more important.

Flatt waited and waited for the voice to continue echoing in his head, but—

When the Servant finally did continue, what he said surprised Flatt in an altogether different way.

[To be frank, **I do not know.**]

“Are you serious!?”

Flatt had risen halfway off the bench he was sitting on. Realizing that there was nobody in front of him, and that he looked rather silly, he embarrassedly sat down while furtively glancing about.

Paying no attention to the young man's antics, the Servant continued to speak, with a voice devoid as ever of any peculiar characteristics.

"None ought to know my true name, save perhaps for myself—the true me, not the me of legend. ...Or, perhaps, the one who put a stop to my murders."

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The knife Flatt held was not a true relic, but rather, an imitation. But where that Heroic Spirit was concerned—

It could draw forth a much more powerful spirit, precisely because it, like the Heroic Spirit, was an imitation designed for public consumption.

That Servant had no name, though there was proof that he once lived in this world.

And yet, none knew what he truly looked like.

None knew his appearance; his true name; whether he was a man or a woman;

Or whether he was even a human at all.

He—though his gender was not known—was a symbol of fear; one who terrified the world. The people imagined him in countless ways, and he was the topic of myriad tales and theories.

Perhaps a doctor;

Perhaps a teacher;

Perhaps an aristocrat;

Perhaps a prostitute;

Perhaps a butcher;

Perhaps a devil;

Perhaps a faerie;

Perhaps a conspiracy;

Perhaps madness.

It was not even certain whether he was a single person or not. The people's fear of him was exploited to create all manner of stories about him—and then they were unified into a single legend.

But he was not merely a legend. He had really existed.

Indeed, for Flatt, who had spent many years at the Clock Tower, his legend was probably the one closest to home.

Everyone knew what proof there was that he existed.

In the district of London known as Whitechapel—

There were found the macabre corpses of five prostitutes. There could be no greater proof.

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[That said, there is a name by which I am known, and by which I identified myself in my letters.]

[Jack the Ripper.]

A few months earlier—

El-Melloi II had played the game “Night Wars of the British Empire”.

He had mail-ordered the game from Japan, thinking that it would be a wargame about the various legendary knights of England.

Alas, the Japanese do not distinguish between the homophones “knight” and “night” in writing, and in this case, they had meant the latter. The game's protagonist was based on a real person, who wandered the streets of London at night while fighting against the mad-dened personality within him. At times, he would also end up fighting demons. It was one of *those* adventure games.

Even though it wasn't what he was expecting, El-Melloi played the game until he cleared it, and jotted down a list of his honest opinions about the game. First on that list was his opinion that “the game's title leaves something to be desired”.

When he turned the survey card over, he noticed that there was some information about the prizes he could win in those sweepstakes.

If you send in this card, you could be one of 100 lucky winners to receive a replica of a knife with Jack the Ripper's signature on it! (sheath included)

——Like hell Jack the Ripper would inscribe his name on a knife. He snorted at the thought. He lost interest in the prize itself, and returned to impassively writing down his thoughts about the game.

And all the while, he was utterly unaware of what that survey card would end up bringing about.

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And then, a few months after that—

Flatt sat in front of the fountain in the park, having a mental conversation with the being in his head.

In just a short while, he seemed to have gotten the hang of the situation, and was speaking naturally with the being.

“So, you're saying that because you were nobody at all, you gained the power to become anybody at all, huh...”

[Righto. You got lucky, though. If I had manifested as a Servant of any other class, I would have possessed your body and gone on a maddened rampage to... well, in any case, let us just say that I would be swimming in blood by now.]

“Uh...” Flatt found it difficult to interpret that as a joke. He couldn't help but look around at the faces of the people around him.

Were Jack to go on a rampage, most magi would worry that ordinary people would come to know of the existence of magic. Flatt, however, found himself relieved for a different reason, one rather atypical of a mage.

“U-um... by the way, what class are you? Are you Assassin?”

[Ah, my apologies. I am of the Berserker class.]

“Huh?”

The Servant's answer sent Flatt into a tizzy.

Flatt wasn't a *complete* ignoramus—he had done some basic research into the Holy Grail War.

He knew that Servants of the Berserker class would gain power in exchange for losing their sanity.

Perhaps Jack understood why Flatt was confused. He began to matter-of-factly explain the nature of his class.

“You see, I was enshrined in legend as a symbol of madness. The class of the maddened warrior is the only one that really fits me.”

“Ah... like how a negative times a negative makes a positive!”

Any ordinary mage... or indeed, any ordinary person would have to wonder if that explanation would fly. Flatt, of course, took it in stride.

This, in turn, surprised Jack, who mumbled something before amending his explanation. [If I were the soul of an actual person, this probably would not have happened. Since I was just an emblem of madness, however, I suppose I was overlooked. It is quite the miracle. Then again, perhaps there is something unique about this Holy Grail War itself.]

“Wow. Servants really are awesome!” As usual, a simple response from Flatt.

Recalling a matter which had made “him” uneasy, the Servant started talking about something else. [By the way, when I appeared before you in the form of a police officer—why did you not attempt to hypnotize me... or use some other form of magical suggestion? Surely that is the most basic sort of magic?]

“Huh? ...Er, well, I figured I should make sure the cop understood what was going on, first.”

[I was worried about your competence for a moment there, lad.]

Flatt, sensing that there was a tinge of embarrassment in the voice in his head, changed the topic of conversation. “So, if you find the Grail, what’ll you wish for?”

[Hrm... as you are my Master, I suppose I ought to inform you... but I beg you, please do not laugh at me.]

The sane Berserker hesitated for a moment before continuing to let his voice echo in Flatt’s head.

[...I want to know who slew those five prostitutes in Whitechapel—in other words, my own identity. That is all.]

“Your identity...”

[I am a mere fable, with no real presence. And yet, when I think of the people inventing stories and hypotheses about my true identity and nature—it frightens me. I do not expect that you will understand me, given that you have a body and a name and a past to call your own.] His voice sounded meek.

He just wanted to know who he was.

It was an unusual idea, but at the same time, it was likely all that the Servant desired.

Flatt thought for a while. Then, straightforwardly, he asked the Servant a question. “So when you find out who you are, what will you do? Like, if someone summons you somewhere besides a Holy Grail War... will you appear in the body of the person you once were?”

[That may well happen. Though my current form differs from the person I once was, it remains true that I was once a serial killer. The legends about me are all based on that premise. If I am a person of legend who also existed in fact, the onus is upon me to be as true to my reality as possible.] The way he spoke somehow conveyed the impression that he was lonely.

“Doesn’t that just mean there’s no real you?” stated Flatt, straightforwardly and to the point, with no sense of decorum whatsoever.

Flatt was just such an outrageously frank person. The Servant was taken aback, and the voice resounding in Flatt’s head reflected that. [...Do people ever tell you that you lack decorum?]

“Ahaha, they totally do! All the time! Thanks!”

[I was not commending you... but, well, that is fine. We need not discuss this matter any further. Anyway... I am surprised that you saw fit to summon me. You could expect neither the might of a Hero nor the morality of a man from me.]

It was an eminently reasonable thought.

Never mind that Jack the Ripper himself was the one asking. Anyone would be hesitant even to be around him, and to summon him as

a Servant on top of that—

Flatt, frank as frank could be, replied.

“I love people like you! You know, men of mystery with secret identities and all that!”

[...]

“Come on, that’s so *cool*! Besides, you’re an awesome guy! Isn’t that great!?”

He may have had a mage’s intuition, but his temperament was... not so mage-like.

If there was one way in which his temperament was fitting of a mage—

It was that his intuitions differed ever so slightly from those of most ordinary people.

To phrase it in the most generous way possible, he was gifted with a superabundance of curiosity—and magi ought to be curious.

Though it was unclear how the Servant interpreted Flatt’s reply—

He, a Servant who should have been composed of pure madness and savagery, readied himself for battle. With the slightest bit of optimism in his voice, he spoke.

[Very well, my Master. Where shall we begin? Using my abilities, we can infiltrate any place whatsoever, and slay the enemy Masters where they stand! I await your orders. What might they be?] The Servant was clearly in high spirits.

His Master, on the other hand, just sat there with a calm smile on his face. Truly, he was the least mage-like of all magi.

“The weather’s nice today. Let’s just enjoy the sun for a while. It’s nice and warm!”

[Wha...!?!]

Thus began the journey of a young man who knew nothing of tragedy, and the Villainous Spirit who created nothing but tragedy.

There was just one thing they shared: none stood further from the ideals of the Holy Grail War than they.

That one thing, and nothing else.

ACT3 アサシン



Act 3: Assassin

In a certain land, there once lived a woman of deep faith.

That was all. That was the whole story.

The devout woman was so pious that she behaved as a heteroclite.
And so, the people scorned her as a zealot.

Worse still, even those who worshipped the same god as she looked upon her with contempt.

But the zealot did not hate the people.

The people only hated her because she was yet weak of faith.

She was not pious enough. It was as simple as that.

The zealot forged on, pushing herself even harder.

She sought after the miracles created by her predecessors, and recreated every last one of them.

But her faith was still weak.

It was far, far too weak.

—or at least, that's what the zealot heard, as the world screamed at her.

Every man of faith began to shun the zealot.

——My faith is weak.

——My faith is weak.

——My faith is weak.

In the end, the zealot was unable to do anything. She lived as a zealot, and died as a zealot. Not as a martyr. She lived a life of nothing, and then, she was gone.

And yet, the zealot did not begrudge the world.

She was ashamed of her own weak faith, and gave herself over to the maelstrom of faith once again.

The zealot felt no hate for the people. Only the gods of the heathens drew her ire.

So lived the zealot, irredeemable in the eyes of the common people.

That was the whole story.

That was where her story was supposed to end.

—until the moment when the false Grail chose the zealot.

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Nighttime — Eastern Snowfield — the Marsh District

The marsh district unfolded to the east of the city center. It was home to many crystal-clear lakes.

In between the lakes were countless many swamps. A network of roads was knitted through the district.

Out of all the land surrounding the city, the eastern region—the Marsh District—was likely the most developed; even so, there was not much in the way of civilization save for a few fishing spots and vacation homes.

And on one particular plot of land, there was an enormous vacation home.

A Bounded Field had been established there. Even if an ordinary man were able to detect the home, he would be unable to bring himself to worry about it.

Architecturally speaking, it really was in bad taste. Compared to the lakeshore boarding house a little to the west, it was a bit too Gothic, designed with black and gray motifs.

And—

In the basement of the house, a number of magi were present. They had just completed a summoning ceremony.

The summoning was a success.

All that remained was to answer the Servant's query in the affirmative, thereby completing the contract.

But—

——This is strange.

The summoner, a mage by the name of Jester Karturei, stared quizzically at the Heroic Spirit he had summoned.

Around ten of his disciples were also present.

And in the center of the summoning circle stood one other figure, clearly neither human nor mage.

An air of intimidation, infinitely deep and pure, emanated from a solitary woman, clad in black robes.

She seemed quite young, but it was difficult to be sure, since she kept her face turned to face the floor.

Right then, Jester felt a severe sense of foreboding.

——The summoning should have brought forth an Assassin.

For the most part, it is impossible to pick the class into which a Heroic Spirit is summoned.

But there are exceptions.

With the appropriate preparations and incantations, one can choose to summon either Assassin or Berserker, each of which has a special characteristic that makes this possible.

Accordingly, Jester chose to summon a Servant of the Assassin class.

By their very nature, only a small number of Heroic Spirits can be summoned as Servants of the Assassin class; and at first glance, the being at the center of the summoning circle seemed to be one of those Heroic Spirits, but—

——I was under the impression that Assassins always wear a white skull mask....

Heroic Spirits of the Assassin class all clad themselves in a black robe and hide their faces with a skull mask. Jester knew that much from his earlier research.

But the woman before him, though wrapped in black cloth, did not wear a white mask. Her actual face was visible from between the layers of fabric.

—In that case, am *I* supposed to pose the question...?

This was Jester's first time actually experiencing the Holy Grail War. Of course, this Holy Grail War was an imitation from the beginning. It was impossible to anticipate the ways in which it would differ from the War in Japan.

In the first place, it was bizarre that the parties behind this entire war—the stars of the show—had yet to reveal themselves. Jester assumed that a clan at least as renowned as the Einzberns would have been involved in the creation of something so grand and elaborate as this Holy Grail War, but he did not sense the presence of any magi fitting that description.

Perhaps they were hiding themselves well; or perhaps they were watching from afar.

Jester set all of his doubts aside, and waited for the Servant to make a move.

And then—the black-clad woman slowly raised her head. Jester's form was reflected in her pupils.

"I ask of you..."

Her gaze was as powerful as she was intimidating: deep and infinitely black, pure and unpolluted.

The mage unwittingly let out a quiet murmur as he chuckled softly, waiting for the Servant to continue speaking.

"Are you... the mage... who has summoned me... to attain the Holy Grail?"

She rubbed the black cloth wrapped around her mouth and spoke deliberately and delicately.

Relieved that she had finally spoken, Jester stepped forward. Brimming with a newfound confidence, he spread his arms as if to welcome her into this world.

“Indeed, I am. I shall———”

【.....Delusional Heartbeat.....】

The moment she spoke, time stopped.

Jester felt something brush against his chest. He lowered his head to look at it.

——What’s thiİs?

And tHen—he saw soMethINg Red in frOnT of his tořso, and he NOTICed ThAt iT wAs in facT HOIdIng ontO ōsoMeThInG rEd, AND HĒ rĕalizEd ThAt ThĒ THING iT WAS hOLdIng WAs ACtUALLY HIS hĕārt. And ——

He did not raise his head back up. Jester’s body collapsed to the ground.

“How...!?”

Seeing their master’s body suddenly turn utterly immobile, Jester’s disciple-mages panicked. Their eyes grew wide as they looked at the situation unfolding before them.

A third arm, red in color, had sprouted from the woman’s back. It extended all the way to Jester’s body, and where it brushed against his chest—

How strange. That red hand came to hold a heart—and then crushed it.

The remaining mages looked at their master’s body and at the woman, their gaze flitting back and forth. They cried out, frenziedly.

“Y-you rogue!”

“What did you do to Lord Jester!?”

“Are you not a Servant!?”

As they panicked and shouted, the mages armed themselves with weapons and intensely focused their magical energies.

As she looked upon Jester’s disciples emotionlessly, the black-robed woman said just one thing.

Indeed, it was ephemeral.



“Our god most-compassionate... has no chalice...”

Perhaps they heard her, or perhaps they didn't. Either way, one of the men drew a magical-seeming dagger and leapt towards her, trying to impale her through her back.

And then—

A wet, aberrant sound echoed around the chamber as her shoulders began to warp.

Her left arm reached backwards at an abnormal angle and ever-so-gently touched him and—

【.....Fantastical Cybermind.....】¹

And right away, his head burst into flames and splattered everywhere, accompanied by an explosive noise, as if his head had itself become a bomb.

Hearing the blast and seeing a flash of light, the mages all cowered in fear.

Only two of them had perished—but that was enough to convince them that they were dealing with a real, honest-to-god Servant: a being against which they were utterly powerless.

“I shall cleanse... the heretic magi...”

As she spoke deliberately, she stood still, not moving for some few seconds.

It seemed like she was allowing the magi time to flee—but they did not. In unison, they took a great leap backwards and unleashed the full force of their magical energies on the women.

Witnessing this piteous sight, the black-robed Servant slowly shook her head, an almost-despondent look in her eye—

And yet, without a trace of mercy, she spoke words of power.

【.....Illusional Ependyma.....】²

And then—silence descended upon the chamber.

The black-clad Servant was surrounded by the corpses of magi.

¹ 空想電腦

² 夢想髓液

All of the mages that had tried to release their magical energy upon her had, for some reason, been consumed by their own mighty flames. Their remains were strewn about the floor.

The only one who had any idea what happened was the Servant. She hastened up the stairs out of the basement, still silent.

She reverted to her spirit form, and, unseen by anyone—

She raced off into the darkness of the night. She, who once had no direction in her life, had finally found a definite purpose.

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The zealot sought proof.

Proof that she was truly a person of faith; proof that she was one of Allah's people. Nothing more.

It was not until much, much later that she realized that her search for proof was itself evidence that her faith was weak.

When she was young, she honed herself, so as to earn a name—a name that would serve as a proof of her faith.

In order to attain that name, which would evidence her piety, she would have to attain power—power enough to perform a divine miracle.

However, only a particular, special sort of miracle would suffice.

It had to be a miracle that could bring death, swiftly and reliably; a miracle greater than any known to a *zindīq* or *mohareb*.

She was a member of a sect that pursued such miracles: the Hashshashin, a cult that was zealotic by its very nature.

Even in the innermost circles of the cult, however, she was scorned as a zealot among zealots.

The past grandmasters of the cult had all performed a miracle bearing the name of Shaytān, and in doing so earned their titles.

Each and every one of them was shocked by her deeds.

None of them was prepared to believe what they had seen.

She was but a young girl, a mere lamb—

How could she master all the miracles performed by the preceding 18 grandmasters?

There was no question that she had honed herself with the most Herculean of efforts.

It went without saying that she had spilled much of her pure, uncorrupted blood in the process.

And yet, the people of her sect would not recognize her as a grandmaster.

“What have you accomplished? You have imitated miracles already performed. That is naught but rote. It is because your faith is weak that you are unable to bring forth a miracle of your own contrivance.”

She was certainly talented.

That is to say, she had talent enough to master the abilities of all the grandmasters of the past. She had the strength to bear the pain she went through as she mortified her flesh. She had the fortitude to face any hardship through strength and willpower. But she was not endowed with the talent needed to bring about a miracle of her own invention.

That was only half the problem. Her ability to master so many miracles, when mastery of a single one would take an ordinary person a lifetime—that was the other half. The people may well have feared her, knowing that she was able to achieve those miracles in a matter of years.

“And thus, you are weak of faith. We cannot bestow the title of grandmaster unto one such as yourself.”

That argument was mere sophistry. And yet, she accepted it wholeheartedly.

——I see. My faith is not deep enough.

——How much I have yet to learn. I have brought shame upon the miracles of the former grandmasters.

She did not resent anyone else. She merely continued to hone her own abilities.

And when a new grandmaster—the Hundred-Faced—was selected—

She saw that he was capable of all manner of things, things she could not do herself, but she did not envy him. She only felt shame at her own impiety.

In the end, the zealot found no proof of her faith, and vanished into the mists of time.

Or so it should have been—

But, what a quirk of fate! When she was summoned by the man called Jester, she was given knowledge of the world by the Holy Grail, and immediately came to know her destiny.

She had to bring the Holy Grail—that emblem of heresy—unto naught. That was all she desired.

And though she was not unaware that the past grandmasters had all sought it—

She felt only sorrow.

She did not resent those grandmasters. Neither did she revile them.

Their faith was, without a doubt, deeper than hers. Even now, they were worthy of her respect.

Her hatred was directed at that which had led them astray: the Holy Grail War.

She had to put an end to it. She tore through the dark of the night, hastening forth in search of the Holy Grail.

Given that she had slain those magi, she would soon lose her supply of magical energy.

She was still receiving magical energy, but it was a mere trickle.

When the flow of magical energy came to a complete stop, she would vanish.

Would that happen after a few days? A few hours? A few seconds, even—?

But it mattered not.

Until her last moment,

Even if her body was a mere apparition—

The nameless Assassin would not question her purpose.

Believing that the piety of at least those who, like herself, had been faithful would be rewarded,

She, without a moment's hesitation, made the Holy Grail War itself her enemy.

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A few minutes later.

In the basement of the lakeside cottage where the nameless Heroic Spirit was summoned, there were no men; only corpses.

By the time Assassin departed, this became an even more certain truth.

“Kha!”

A pristine laugh rang out.

But the truth was what it was.

In that room, there were no men; only corpses.

“Khaa! Ha ha ha ha ha ha!”

A peal of laughter echoed. It sounded like the laugh of a child, jubilant from the bottom of its heart; but at the same time, it was warped—somehow perverted.

But the truth was still what it was.

In that room, there were no men; only corpses.

“Wow, that was a surprise! To think that the Holy Grail would bring me such a kooky little maverick!”

The man bounded up like a jack-in-the-box, the Command Spells on his right hand still gleaming.

“How beautiful...”

——I was planning on awakening the Spider with the power of the Grail and living to see this tiresome world be destroyed, but....

——I had no idea I still had “emotions”—those vestiges of humanity!

He trembled, beset by emotions—

And the truth remained what it was.

In that room, there were no men; only corpses.

Given that the truth was what it was, it could only mean one thing. The mage Jester Karturei, now choked with emotion, was, at this point, a corpse.

“What pathos! What pulchritude! How bewitching, resplendent, dainty, picturesque, *cute*! Oh, what a tragic mistake I have made—when I once had so much time and so little to do, I should have mastered the *Ars Poetica*! I cannot find the words to describe her piety!”

Jester was having the time of his life. Paying no heed to the corpses scattered around the room, he began to unbutton his shirt. Magical-looking emblems appeared on his bare chest—emblems that were entirely unlike Command Spells.

It was a ring of six red marks, similar in form to the cylinder of a six-shooter.

However, one of the six marks—the one closest to his left breast—had turned dark.

“She **crushed** my concept-nucleus with such ease! I was as careful as I could be! And it didn’t even matter! With her arm, she could return even a being far stronger than me to naught!”

Jester touched the darkened mark with a finger, whereupon his fingertip was sucked into the skin of his chest. Strangely, not a drop of blood fell from the mark. He shoved his hand up to the wrist into the muddy flesh-colored morass and **squelched** at his own innards.

“My mage-soul has been utterly destroyed.”

Then, like a gear, or indeed, like a revolver, the six marks rotated, almost as though they were wriggling. The darkened mark shifted to

his left flank, loading a new red mark on his left breast.

“In that case, I had best put on a new face from here on out.”

And then, somehow—just as those six marks had moved, his body and face pulsed. A moment later, he had the appearance of an entirely different man.

He withdrew his finger from his chest and placed it on the darkened seal at his side. He was in a state of ecstasy as he rubbed his finger around it.

“That concept-nucleus was shielded by countless many layers of protective magic. And despite that, she made all of that as unto less than nothing with that red arm. Her fingers reached the very core of my being.... An arm so simple, and yet ever so fiendish! And yet—nay, thus!—it is beautiful! A Noble Phantasm—what a thing!”

He continued to speak to the corpses strewn around him, with a clear, resounding voice. Of course, they did not respond.

“I am surprised that she was able to use that fearsome technique without hesitation, and so many times at that. Had she access only to the energy of any other mage—an ordinary one, unlike myself... she surely would have run out almost right away.”

He flashed his unusually-sharp canines at the altar of corpses. He continued to talk to himself in a booming—and almost bewitching—voice.

“I suppose I need not tire of the world quite yet.... That beautiful assassin! Her piety! Nary could I allow her to vanish without a name!”

That—was a statement that could only be made by those who had seen her memories.

Via the linkage of magical energy that connected a Master and Servant, the former could view the latter’s thoughts and memories as though they were dreams.

“Of course not! Who would dare let such a thing go to **waste**!?”

If Jester spoke true, it would mean that he had learned of her faith through a dream he had while he was dead, but—

“I shall grant you a name! Your beautiful face; your beautiful soul; your beautiful power; your beautiful faith... I will desecrate them and

defile them and derogate them and debauch them and degrade them all! What greater pleasure could there be!?”

He laughed heartily. His visage gradually took on a wicked color.

“O pleasure! O impermanence! O beauty! I will make that beautiful Servant kneel before me, and I will destroy her faith, and when I have drained the last of her power, what a sight that will be!”

Jester’s heart beat to a euphoric rhythm as a shadow extended from the ground beneath his feet.

It was a red shadow—a red as supremely deep as the emblems on his chest.

When the shadow finally wrapped itself around the bodies of all of Jester’s disciples, it divorced itself from the ground, and became a crimson wave that engulfed the countless many corpses.

And then, right away, the shadow withdrew back into Jester’s body. As it did, it was a yet-deeper red than before.

In just seconds, the bodies had been reduced to mere skeletons by that inexorable shadow.

“The Holy Grail? The destruction of the world? Those, too, are wonderful! This, I grant! But what trifles they are! They are mere dreck before her despair!”

And then—

He, a living corpse—a vampire¹—climaxed from envisioning the taste of the Servant’s blood, as his dead eyes glowed bright with life.

“As fellow heretics in this land, let us be the best of friends! Khaa... Khahahahahahahahahahaha!”

And so, with nary a proper contract binding them—

Assassin’s Master infused the Holy Grail War with a toxic darkness.

Laughing and laughing and——

¹吸血鬼

ACT4 キャスター



Act 4: Caster

The room was dark.

Through a small gap in the window blinds, the roof of the neighboring high-rise was visible.

Judging from the backdrop behind the neighboring high-rise, it seemed that the room was rather high up, and located at the center of the city of Snowfield.

The stars shone outside the window.

The room, illuminated by the pale starlight, felt something like a modern office.

From the rows of desks with computers to the air-conditioning unit on the ceiling, nothing seemed unusual about the room. One could easily forget that this room was also part of the stage atop which the Holy Grail War would be enacted.

However, none of the fluorescent lights on the ceiling were illuminated. The dignified voice of a leaderly man resounded through the darkness—

As if to say that this city itself *was* the Holy Grail War.

“Well, then... it seems that the other five Servants have been summoned,” said the man. He spoke with great gravitas.

“Indeed. As of this time, the only Master whose identity we have been able to confirm is Tiné Chelc, who brought the King of Heroes under her control. We have been unable to establish contact with Mr. and Mrs. Kuruoka, who had planned to ally with us in the War. We are aware of multiple other magi in the city, but regrettably, we have been

unable to determine which of them, if any, possess Command Spells,” replied a humble voice from the darkness.

“Is that so,” replied the man, with barely-concealed frustration and disappointment in his voice. “The city-wide surveillance system is surprisingly impotent.”

The other man calmly continued to deliver his report. “We did observe one mage who, in a park in broad daylight, displayed his Command Spells and summoned a Servant. However, the Servant performed some variety of unusual illusion, without revealing itself. In doing so, it evaded our agent who was situated there, disguised as a sunbather. At first we thought the mage to be a fool, but it seems that he is quite capable.”

“And you have not identified the Heroic Spirit? Nor any of its characteristics?”

“I am afraid not. Furthermore, with regards to the first Heroic Spirit summoned—even though the summoning took place in the city, we were unable to make heads or tails of the surveillance data. We are certain that the Heroic Spirit was summoned, but we have been unable to ascertain anything else, not even its location.”

“Hm.... I presume this to be the doing of those governmental interlopers, judging from that ‘declaration’ of theirs.”

He must have been referring to the incident with Rohngall and Faldeus some days prior.

However, the other man, his subordinate, shook his head, responding in the negative.

“I am afraid that cannot be so. The first summoning occurred essentially at the same time as the issuance of their declaration.”

“...In that case, it is most likely that the first summoning was performed by the Kuruoka family.” He stood up quietly, a sour look on his face, and went on. “So be it. In any case, the greatest obstacle facing us is the King of Heroes. We need only eliminate him.”

“Aye.”

Silence was about to descend over the room—when, suddenly, the phone began to ring.

The leaderly man reluctantly picked up the receiver and, in a most businesslike manner, said, "...it's me."

«'Sup, bro! How ya doin'?»

The man made a show of furrowing his brow. "Caster. What do you want?" he replied.

«Come on man, don't be like that! Listen. I was just watching the boob tube, and guess what?! They said that some of the babelicious broads around these parts cost millions of smackers a night! Is that legit!?»

"...what if it is?"

«Call one in for me tonight, bro. Help a brutha' out.» The man on the other side of the phone was blunt. Very blunt.

"I am no brother of yours." The leaderly man's cheek twitched.

«Why not, man? Don't tell me you forgot about how we made a blood oath! We're blood brothers! You know, I like the sound of that—blood brothers. I looked it up on the internet—apparently people do this sort of stuff in Scandinavia all the time. I dig it!»

"...You, a Heroic Spirit, forged a contract with me, your Master. That is the precise extent of our relationship." His temples twitched as his grip on the receiver grew firmer.

There were Command Spells boldly visible on the back of his hand, forming a shape evocative of chains.

In that case, the man on the other side of the phone must have been his Servant. It was strange that they were so distant from one another, both in terms of physical distance and in terms of their relationship—it was unusual for a Master and Servant to converse by phone.

The Servant grumbled, «You just don't get it, man,» before resuming the conversation at a rapid-fire pace, putting pressure on his Master.

«Don't get me wrong, okay? My job is to *make* Heroes. I sure as heck am not a Hero myself. But if you want to treat me like a hero, that is A-OK. 'Specially when it comes to the ladies. No, wait, come to think of it, of course I'm a hero! I mean, come on—how can a guy

boink a hundred chicks and make a thousand babies and *not* be a hero to forever-aloners!》

“Enough with the implausible tall tales. If you have time to tell lies, you have time to work. Return to your duties.”

《Yeesh! I’ve gotta *keep* doing that? Step into my shoes for a bit, man! Listen. All I want from the Holy Grail is good food and hot babes. More importantly, I want to see what kind of drama comes out of this war, and what happens to all the participants in the end. That’s all! But at this rate, I’m gonna go mad from all this work before the war ends!》

Caster’s Master sighed and humored Caster, acknowledging his complaints. “I will prepare women and food for you. Now, return to your work with all due speed. Produce weapons ever more sublime.”¹》

《Man, you’re a real wet blanket. You know, this isn’t even my specialty. Don’t forget that, kay? Besides, if you wanted a counterfeiter, there are better people out there! So I was on the internet yesterday, and I read about this guy named Elmyr de Hory. And plus, I heard a rumor—apparently, there’s another guy who can use some kind of super-ultra-awesome magic to copy things over and over again.”²》

“A mere copy is of no value to us. A counterfeit that does not surpass the original object will be of no avail against the King of Heroes.”

《Ha! So ya like my adaptations, huh?! I’m so happy I could cry. Not! Go screw the pooch, why don’tcha! Ah, bugger. If I’d known this would happen, I wouldn’t have joked about my stories being better than the real thing back when they made all that racket about forgeries. I mean, shit. I’d put that incident a hundred years behind me, and I was totally getting down and dirty with Cleopatra and Yang Guifei, and then *you* come along and drag me out of bed. And look at me now! I’m here slaving away, doing your dirty work! I was not expecting that, man! This is a load of crap. Who’d want to hear a story like this?! Gimme a break!》

¹昇華

²アイ アム ザ ボーン オブ マイ スウオード

“Do not misunderstand me. I chose you not because of those anecdotes about your life. Quite simply—you are one who can create legends that exceed the legends of old. I believe that you have the power to invent tales that surpass even the greatest legends of old—and the power to give form to those tales,” his Master replied, quelling his frustration. He had immediately recognized that Caster’s tales were full of lies.

«Ha! Look, *bro*, I don’t give a rat’s behind about your compliments. Hey, I’ve got an idea! Why don’t you take those compliments and write a book based on them? And then go ahead and read it to your old lady. While she’s in bed with *me*, that is! ...Actually, if you’re going to do that, show me a draft first. See, I’m a lot better with fixing crappy scripts than I am at writing legends, so———»

The man did not hear Caster out to the very end, hanging up the receiver mid-sentence.

The flood of words receded, leaving the room utterly silent once again.

The man went on to speak into the darkness of the room, acting as though his conversation with Caster had never happened.

“Gilgamesh: the king of Heroes.... It seems that his nameless sword and his infinite treasury shall prove to be our greatest obstacle.”

The man stood up from his chair once again, and slowly paced around the room with his hands behind his back.

“As such, I shall have no choice but to overwhelm him with numbers before he draws his sword. We must use every means available to us to lure him into a state of weakness—and then we will murder him, honorably.”

With every step he took, he left a powerful—even intimidating—aura. It was as though the darkness itself glowed the color of exigency.

“However, mere numbers will not suffice to defeat him. After all, on top of being unaffected by physical attacks, Heroic Spirits are immeasurably stronger than even the finest athletes. Of course, the Caster I have summoned is an exception. In a brawl, I should imagine that even *I* might have the upper hand... but that is not my concern now.”

He glanced askance, as if he had said something he should not have. He then collected himself and continued to pace.

“Then again... what if men could master the use of Noble Phantasms?”

In the context of the Holy Grail War, a “Noble Phantasm” was a nigh-godlike ability possessed by each Hero. Take, for example, the sword Ama-no-Murakumo from the legend of Yamato Takeru. It, like, all Noble Phantasms, is a symbol of the Hero that wields it, and draws out the greatest powers of its wielder.

Naturally, they are not the sorts of things one could find lying around in gun shops or antique shops. Indeed, it would scarcely be an exaggeration to say that summoning a Servant is equivalent to summoning a Noble Phantasm. So immense is the power of a Noble Phantasm—a wild card that can turn the tide of battle.

“Suppose, furthermore, that each of those weapons were more powerful than the original items on which they were based. What then?”

Having walked deep into the darkness of the room, the man stopped before a wall, and—

He raised his right hand—the hand on which were inscribed his Command Spells—and flipped a switch. The room lit up.

In the room, suddenly awash with light—

A line of people extended from one end of the expansive room to the other. Each one of them was clad in black.

They were not the black robes typical of magi, however—a distinctive piece of equipment hung from each of their waists, like an emblem of authority.

Men and women stood there in no particular order. All in all, there were perhaps 30 people in that lineup of police officers.

Each of them stood at attention, their black uniforms exuding an impressive aura. Each one held in their hands a weapon, each of a different type.

What a bizarre sight.

Those utterly stony-faced uniformed police officers held swords, bows, shields, spears, chains, scythes, and bludgeons, among other things. What's more, they all had a pair of handcuffs and a pistol holstered at their belts. They had long since passed "unfitting" and were well into the realm of "absurd". One of them even had a golden arquebus over his shoulder. It was like they were entertainers in police garb, on their way to a performance to promote tourism in the Snowfield area.

Odds are, however, that any half-decent mage that saw them would not laugh, but rather, would faint.

A power that had been tempered with magical energy and vitality seeped out of the weapons they were carrying, as if to erode the very air within the room.

Those Noble Phantasms were all counterfeits.

Even so, they were mightier than their originating legends.

“——Clan Calatin: the Twenty-Eight Monstrosities——”

“Those were the warriors of Celtic myth who crossed swords with Cú Chulainn. Effective immediately, that will be your codename.”

As he gazed upon that overwhelming yet out-of-place power with satisfaction—

He—the police chief of Snowfield—spread his arms wide and issued a booming declaration.

“Though my words may mean little, as police chief, I shall guarantee this. As a mage, I swear this.”

“You are justice incarnate.”

Upon hearing that, the entire line of police officers stamped their feet in perfect unison. As one, they saluted the police chief, who was their Master, and at the same time, their master.

And upon witnessing that action, any discerning person would have come to understand.

They were not mere police officers; rather, they had undergone some sort of special training beyond what was typical in their profession.

Their organization had established a “net” that ensconced the entire city.

All they required of the Servant was his talent of Noble Phantasm creation, a task with which the magi under their control had assisted.

In other words—

Mere humans though they were, they would defeat Heroic Spirits, thus shaking the very foundations of the Holy Grail War.

In the end, what destiny awaited them—?

That was a story that the man summoned as Caster had not yet finished writing.

ACT5 ライダー



Act 5: Rider

In conclusion, “he” was a being as foreign as could be.

“He” was summoned to this false Holy Grail War as a Servant of the Rider class.

“His” existence was proof that this Holy Grail War was false; proof that there was nothing less worthy of the title “Holy Grail” than the object of this War.

Only in name was “he” a Heroic Spirit, and “he” was not by any means a Hero.

Then, a Villainous Spirit? A Demonic Spirit? Nay. Neither term suffices to describe “him”. In some places, “he” was described as a “curse”, while in some religions, “he” was said to be “divine punishment”.

In the Holy Grail War, Servants are selected from the past and the future—from every age of mankind’s history.

The classes into which the Servants are summoned transcend time. A Hero of the past, known only via lore, may be summoned, as may a Hero of the future, not yet born into this world. If the Holy Grail War had existed when Amakusa Shirou lived, he may have even been able to summon his more powerful future self, an icon of heroism.

From that perspective—“he” had existed since time immemorial, and “he” would likely continue to exist far into the future. “He” lived a shorter life than anyone, and “he” lived a longer life than anyone.

And so, “he”—a being with physical presence, though not a Heroic

Spirit—

Even at this very moment—there is no doubt that “he” continues to take the lives of those that live on this planet.

Indeed, perhaps “he” does so so that “he” may “himself” provide nourishment for life to begin anew.

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How beautiful.

Thus thought a certain young girl as she gazed upon that which sprawled before her.

It was a city she was familiar with.

It was the city where she was raised. Ever so many buildings towered over her, scraping the vast sky above with such vigor that they seemed ready to swallow her up too.

A pair of six-lane causeways met at a mighty intersection. The primary north-south and east-west arterial roads of the City of Snowfield met there, not far from the city center. From the skies above, the roads would seem to form an enormous crucifix, identifying the nexus of the city.

An observer looking only upon those grand roadways might well think himself to be in a city as grand as New York or Chicago. Indeed, those roads raced past the city limits into the multifarious natural environments surrounding Snowfield with such ardor, it was as though they had asserted that they were a part of those surroundings—nay, that they were in fact the culmination, the perfection of all nature.

But—something was amiss.

And the girl found this city, this familiar city, to be beautiful precisely because something was amiss.

She stood at the center of the enormous intersection, which was itself at the center of the city.

It was a scramble intersection, allowing pedestrians to cross it in every which way—but, of course, vehicular traffic would resume at some point, forcing one to vacate the road.

And yet, she had stood there for more than ten minutes.

The traffic lights had cycled any number of times.

But—silence reigned. Not a single car honked at her.

And that was as it should be—

For there was not a single human anywhere to be seen.

An empty intersection.

A road devoid of vehicles.

Did she notice that it was silent? Then again, did she even notice that it was odorless?

From the middle of the road, it was clear that the causeways lacked any human presence.

The girl imagined an asphalt-colored red carpet, a most contradictory thing. She was overwhelmed by the beauty of the complex of tall buildings before her.

In the absence of people, concrete—that symbol of humankind—seemed like a beautiful object of nature, sprung from the Earth's surface.

If a building were a tree, what a grand, harmonious forest this city would be. In that case, the city hall tower, tallest of them all, would be a veteran among them.

She knew not why she was there.

Hence, she wandered the town in search of an answer.

But that brought sadness unto her.

Though she found this world beautiful in its lack of people, she also found it lonely.

At first, she felt nothing but loneliness; within a few days, though, she had grown accustomed to it.

Indeed. She had wandered this empty town for a long, long time.

After about three months, she had stopped counting the days.

She was never struck by hunger, though she knew not why. During the day she would wander the town, and come dusk, she would sleep.

At night, lights would go on in the empty buildings. She would look up at the night sky and be comforted by the stars. Few things are more unsettling than witnessing lights go on in a building empty of people, but she had long since grown used to it, faced with the absurdity of a *city* empty of people.

As loneliness departed her heart, the void it left was filled by the pleasure she felt from being in this empty city.

After looking about the city a while, she lay down in the middle of the intersection and idly gazed up at the night sky

——Daddy. Mommy.

The faces of her parents came to mind.

——I'm sorry. I couldn't do it right.

Her first instinct was to apologize.

But then, she realized that she wasn't even doing anything she should apologize for, and—.

Two old emotions welled up within her.

One was loneliness, stemming from the impossibility of encountering anyone else.

The other was——

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Snowfield Central Hospital

An enormous edifice stood in the central district of the City of Snowfield, covered in white paint.

At a glance, it looked very much like an art museum. In fact, however, it was a large hospital, furnished with the finest equipment in the city.

It was a castle of healing. Multitudes of patients knocked at its gates, seeking treatment from surgeons and psychosomaticists and all sorts of other specialists.

Of course, not all the patients came for elective procedures. Many were brought to the hospital for other reasons.

“...I am afraid that I must inform you that it will be difficult for your daughter to regain consciousness from this state,” said a doctor to a man and a woman.

They glanced at each other. They were probably in their thirties, and seemed to be from East Asia. They seemed more than a little flustered.

“As of today, our daughter has been hospitalized for one full year.... Is that a sign that her condition has taken a turn for the worse?” asked the man, in fluent English.

“...Physically speaking, there are no symptoms that would suggest your daughter’s condition is worsening. Nonetheless, it becomes more difficult to recover from a coma as the duration of the coma increases.”

The patient had been under her care for a full year now, and had yet to recover consciousness. She had entered a vegetative state. Only her body continued to develop, and that too, at a slow pace.

She was just ten years and three months of age.

Who knows what happened to her. One day, she abruptly lost consciousness and wouldn’t wake up, and so, her parents, terrified, brought her to this hospital.

An examination revealed that her body was studded with lesions, particularly around her cranium.

After performing a biopsy on one of the lesions, it was found that they were caused by an unknown strain of bacteria. The doctors all panicked, fearing an epidemic within the hospital.

In the end, the bacteria turned out not to be contagious, leaving it a mystery as to how the girl herself became infected in the first place. The doctors considered having a hospital with even more advanced facilities examine her, but for whatever reason, they were denied access, and so, the girl remained under observation in this municipal hospital.

“We have not observed any changes in the state of the bacterial infestation. Unfortunately, this means that the bacteria will continue to

impede her cerebral function going forward. The bacteria have not caused so much damage as to induce necrosis; nonetheless, they have severely impeded her mental functions.” The doctor spoke as soothingly as she could.

“Is that so...” replied the woman, worry permeating her voice.

“Keep in mind, this doesn’t mean that recovery is impossible. There have been cases where a patient has been in a vegetative state for over 10 years before regaining consciousness. As we learn more about the genome of the bacterium, more treatment options will become available to us. Please, don’t lose hope.” She was doing her best to keep their spirits up, but—

The patient’s father looked ever more disconsolate.

“Never mind her consciousness... are her reproductive functions still intact?” he asked.

“...Pardon?”

For a moment, she didn’t understand what she was being asked.

She simply could not grasp what he had meant by “never mind her consciousness”. For a short while, there was a powerful silence.

Before long, the man spoke again, unwilling to let the silence drag on. Rephrasing his question in greater detail, he said, “I would like to know whether or not her ovaries and uterus—or at the very least, just her ovaries—are developing normally.”

“Er... well, the lesions are only inhibiting growth in the part of her brain to which they are localized, so there haven’t been any adverse effects on her other organs, but...” The doctor just told him the facts as they were, still unable to figure out why he was asking about that. But—

Upon hearing her response, the patient’s parents looked at each other once again. Their faces lit up.

“Really!? Well, in that case, thank you ever so much! We will continue to pay her hospital bills as we have been, so please, continue taking good care of our daughter!”

"I'm sorry? That's not... I mean..."

"We are truly grateful to you, doctor. There, you see, dear? You don't need to worry about that anymore."

"Right you are, honey. Let's get going... we need to make preparations for tonight."

The young couple waltzed out of the hospital in high spirits, leaving behind the utterly perplexed doctor.

She had no idea what would be appropriate to say to them, and so, she just stared at them as they departed.

"Goodness me.... What was the matter with them...?"

Perhaps the shock of finding their daughter comatose had left them all muddled up. The next time they came to the hospital, she would have to recommend that they attend counseling.

As she thought about the peculiar couple, she stepped through the exterior door to the sterile room.

After being sprayed with a disinfecting gas and scoured with ultraviolet light, the interior door opened, to reveal a single bed.

On the bed lay a sleeping girl with an IV drip.

Though it seemed at first glance as though she was merely asleep, her face was emaciated and lifeless, and it did not seem as though she would ever regain consciousness.

"...Even if your parents abandon you, I won't. I'll never give up on you."

The only sound emanating from the girl was the sound of her breath. As the doctor looked at her, she checked her IV drip and her vitals with a renewed determination.

And then—she discovered something unusual.

"...oh?"

She noticed the abnormality while she was repositioning the girl. Something red appeared on the right hand of the motionless girl.

"What... are these...?"

She took a closer look at the girl's hand. There, she saw crimson sigils that reminded her of loops of chain.

"A tattoo...? But who?"

Access to the girl's room was strictly controlled, and there was no way anybody could have brought tattoo implements inside. Besides—when she had checked on the girl that same morning, there was certainly nothing out of the ordinary. A chill ran down her spine.

"Is this... some kind of... prank?"

And though there was no way she could even have known that magi actually existed—

Those marks were, without a doubt, Command Spells.

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The other was—a blend of pain and fear.

She was still a young girl, but when she remembered what her parents had done to her when she was younger still—

That was certainly not cruelty. Rather, it was rationally-applied love.

"“We will make you into an illustrious mage.””

They showered her with love as they spoke those words. Though she was young, she understood that.

And yet, the pain ate away at her.

The pain the pain the pain pain pain pain pain dominated her childhood. Even though she must have had pleasant memories, happy memories, and sad memories, they were all overwritten by overwhelming pain.

"I'm sorry. I'll do it right, so..."

Even when she tried to forget, she could not overcome the pain.

If it had been mere cruelty, she may have been able to seal all of that away.

Unfortunately for her, she really did feel that her parents loved her.

Indeed, that was why she could not flee. She could do nothing but suffer through it.

From a young age, she believed that she could reciprocate her parents' love by suffering.

Alas, she did not understand that her parents did not love her as a person. They only loved her as a vessel for the continuance of their family line—as their future in the world of magic.

Her parents both carried a magical pedigree, and indeed, were among those that made off with some of the machinery underlying the actual Holy Grail War.

The knowledge they gained was relevant not just to the Holy Grail War—they had also acquired part of a certain mage's system of entomomancy¹, and quickly adapted it to their own use.

Their goal: to develop a new way to modify the flesh using even smaller bugs.

And after decades of trial and error—they were finally on their way to perfecting a sort of pseudo-entomomancy.

They used magically-modified bacteria that would better their host.

If they were properly used in the body of a young mage, they would amplify the mage's Magic Circuits. That was their plan.

Once they had perfected their techniques, they chose their first-born daughter as their distinguished first test subject. She experienced great agony. Though her body was scarcely altered, her Magic Circuits had been amplified beyond measure.

As she grew up, her Magic Circuits approached completion. All that was left was for her to inherit the magic of her family. Then, their plan would have been a perfect success, but—

Unluckily for them, they lost control of some of the bacteria, and so the still-young girl was deprived of her consciousness.

In order to ensure that it would remain possible for their daughter, with her amplified Magic Circuits, to succeed them, her parents hospitalized her. Of course, by this point, her parents had no interest

¹ 蟲使い

in her as a person.

And then—

As yet unaware that her parents had all but forsaken her, she wandered on and on in the world of her dreams, a cleft between life and death.

Perhaps because of how the bacteria modified her, her dreams were far and away more realistic than any ordinary dream. In the end, though, it was but a world in which she could neither taste nor smell. It was but a dream.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry... I’m sorry for hurting...!”

As she experienced flashbacks to her past, she screamed out into the empty world. Though she brimmed with magical energy, she lacked knowledge. She was a witch—but a powerless one.

In her dream, she mustered all the strength she had—and she screamed. On and on.

As if to support her, her altered body made her Magic Circuits run wild in the world of her dreams.

As if they recognized they were going to vanish; as if they were mere children crying out “Don’t leave me!”—every cell in her body cried out.

“I’ll do it right! I will, I’ll bear the pain!”

And though she did not know what it was she should do right—

“So please, please don’t leave me! Don’t leave me...!”

Then—she saw a flash of light.

There was a mighty gust of wind—a roar in a soundless world.

She didn’t know what was going on. She leapt to her feet, and looked around the intersection and—

All of the roads were covered in a black fog.

Something had changed, but she couldn’t understand what it was. As she stood there utterly stupefied, a voice rang out.

It was a grating sound, like the scraping noise of swarms of insects battling one another.

And yet, those were words—words with meaning.

“ I A S K : A R E Y O U M Y M A S T E R ? ”

She could not have known what those words meant, and yet—
That Servant was bizarre beyond measure.

To begin with, “he” lacked a persona—let alone the nature of a Hero.

After all, “he” was not a human in the first place.

When “he” was granted knowledge by the Holy Grail, however, “he” appeared as a Servant, in the form of a formless mass of awareness. “He” had neither emotions nor even internal monologue. “He” was a mere mass of knowledge about the Holy Grail War, created by the system—something like a robot.

The words “he” spoke were like dread incarnate, but—
She was not scared.

Someone was there, so she would no longer be lonely. Something had changed in her unchanging world.

She was so happy about that—that she looked up at the skyscrapers shrouded by the black haze, and timidly told “him” her name.

“Who are you? My name is Kuruoka Tsubaki.”

And so, she became the distinguished first Master of the false Holy Grail War.

None could have known of their contract, forged in a dream, and—
Indeed, in the outside world, the girl remained unconscious.

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Snowfield — the Kuruoka residence

“It’s about time for Faldeus to issue his declaration.”

After returning from the hospital, the Kuruokas were in high spirits, getting ready for the ceremony they would conduct that night.

“The ley lines of this area should soon be at their mightiest. Then, I will receive my Command Spells. Once I have them, everything will be in place.”

“Plus, we’ve even prepared a Noble Phantasm as a relic... and if it came down to it, we could use it as a weapon ourselves.”

“Indeed we could. If we are to call forth Shi Huangdi, we must be prepared to demonstrate a proper degree of respect.”

Their daughter was not a matter of discussion at this point.

Apparently, they were preparing to summon the most celebrated figure in Chinese history.

Unfortunately for them, all their preparations would be fruitless.

Not because their unconscious daughter had taken the Command Spells that would have been theirs.

If that were the only issue, they could well have received a different set of Command Spells.

In the end, they did not receive any Command Spells—

But they did receive something else.

Sensing something unusual, the husband looked at his right arm.

“Mm...?”

There was a black spot.

At first glance, it looked like a bruise. He frowned, wondering if he had bumped against something. He looked over to his wife.

“Dear, what do you think this... hey!?”

He was shocked.

Similar black spots appeared all over her face and her arms—and then, she collapsed to the ground, like a marionette whose strings had been cut.

“H-hey...!?”

He tried to get to his wife, but his field of view grew mushy and indistinct. Everything split into a rainbow of colors and fell upwards.

By the time he realized that it was *he* who was falling, it was too late. He did not even have the strength to stand.

As he laid on the verge of unconsciousness, he understood what was happening.

Magical energy was being sucked out of his body and carried off to somewhere else.

As it was not his actual life-energy that was being stolen, he would not die from this. However, he would certainly fall into a stupor.

——This can't be.

——If someone... attacks us now....

——No, what if... somebody... already....

Even as he fell into an eternal darkness, his mind was full with thoughts about the Holy Grail War. Not once did his daughter cross his mind.

And then, a few minutes later—

Both of them leaped to their feet as though nothing had happened. Their bodies were still covered with the black spots.

“...Come to think of it, today is Tsubaki's birthday, isn't it?”

“Ah, that's right, dear! I've got to bake a cake!”

They were conspicuously unwell, and yet they spoke calmly. And about something out of the ordinary for them, at that.

Indeed, they had lost whatever personalities they once had and—

They became living dolls, who lived their lives just as their daughter wanted them to.

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She danced with “him”. She danced with “him”.

To forget the time she spent awake.

“He” danced with her. “He” danced with her.

To grant her every wish.

“Yay! Thank you! Daddy! Mommy!”

“It's okay, Tsubaki. You did a good job.”

“That's right. You're our precious little treasure.”

Having received such a wonderful present, she gaily frolicked about her house.

After having her fun for a while, she smiled at the mass of black fog that stood next to her.

“Thank you for bringing my mom and dad here!”

The Servant did not even nod in reply. “He” merely continued to exist.

The sights of the real world were projected into her dreams.

Perhaps that was the power of the magical energy that had blossomed within her while she was unconscious. Given that it is impossible to affect the real world from within a dreamscape, however, magic used to project the real world into a dream-world was useless; a line of research that few magi would bother to pursue.

The Servant merely facilitated the girl’s unconscious magic.

“He” manipulated her parents in the real world so that they would behave just as she wanted them to.

Of course, “he” also absorbed their magical energy. “His” instincts compelled him to do so.

“He” could not understand human emotions. “He” merely possessed knowledge.

And indeed, because of that, and because of the great strength “he” had, “he” made the girl into the greatest and worst dark horse of the Holy Grail War.

“He” rode on the wind and the waters and the birds and the people and—

Hence, it was appropriate for “him” to be of the Rider class, for “he” had ridden “his” way to dominance over the world.

Much more importantly, however—

“He” was an embodiment of calamity, and the people gave “him” an alias that reflected that. Perhaps that spurious assignment of a personality to “him” was the most important reason that “he” was summoned as Rider.



At one time, “he” let loose the Black Death, which killed thirty million,

And at another time, under the name of the Spanish Flu, “he” killed fifty million.

“He” was the horseman who brought calamity to all. His alias: Pestilence.

As to whether anyone would recognize what “his” alias is, or indeed, that “he” had been summoned as a Servant in the first place—

Either way, the false Holy Grail War was finally on its way to becoming a maelstrom of chaos.

ACT6 ランサー



Act 6: Lancer

The forest was deep—ever so deep—
He looked as if he had fallen into a bottomless bog.

——run
——run ——run
——run ——run ——run

He dashed through the forest, cutting through the night as he went.
Had he really thought about why exactly he was running? Perhaps.
His actions could be described by the simple verb “flee”, but he did
not have it in him to contemplate that verb and to run at the same time.

We could well say that the reason he was “fleeing”—

In other words, the desire to “live”, was what impelled him to race
forth.

He acted on instinct, not on reason.

He was impulsive, not rational.

He did not even know whither he ought to flee. He merely leapt
forward and forward again, on and on.

How long had he been running?

With every step, his legs cried out in agony. The pain radiated
throughout his body unattenuated.

But he had to keep going. His body did not want to stop, nor did
his mind.

Perhaps the endorphins had already cut out. Wave upon wave of unadulterated pain washed over his body, over and over and—

———?.

His ferocious instinct was strong enough to get him through even that.

Trees swept past him like a breeze, and indeed, given how he wended his way through the forest, it was like he had himself become the wind. Just when he was about to arrive at the end of the breeze—

A magically-enhanced bullet pierced through the wind.

“?!”

Before he could even feel pain, his body was overcome by shock.

His momentum carried him to the ground. The earth mercilessly battered his body. As if it were comeuppance for the way his legs had kicked at the ground as he ran, the vast earth became as unto a weapon and walloped him.

“~~~~~?!”

An unvocalized scream.

Try as he might to stand up, the convulsions that overcame his body would not let him do so.

As his mind heard his body cry out in pain, his ear heard a quiet voice echo out.

“...you have caused me quite some trouble.” The speaker seemed level-headed, but beneath his calm veneer, there were clear indications that he was incensed.

The man, who seemed like a mage, lowered his heavily-ornamented revolver and carefully trod on the stomach of the collapsed escapee—and then he shoved the still-hot barrel of the revolver into the open gunshot wound.

There was a hissing sound as the escapee’s flesh was scorched. The odor of singed meat echoed about the forest.

The escapee opened his mouth wider than should have been possible and exhaled moist air from the depths of his throat.

“This is absurd. Of all the things that could have happened, *you* received the Command Spells! What a farce!”

The escapee screamed noiselessly as he thrashed about. There certainly were chain-like markings on his body that looked like Command Spells.

“Why do you think I went to the trouble of making you? Why do you think I amplified your Magic Circuits to their utmost limit? Why do you think I have even let you live this long?”

The mage quietly shook his head and kicked the escapee—still writhing in pain—like a soccer ball.

“...To win the Holy Grail War, I must summon a being that transcends every Hero.”

He walked up to the escapee—and stomped on his face again.

“If I do not summon a being that exceeds every Hero—a being who has such power as to be called a god—I cannot hope to defeat those Heroes who are said to be kings.”

And again.

“And if it has come to this... I have no choice but to summon a being more ancient than the first Hero—one of those of Egypt who became gods.”

And he trampled him.

“But even the power of the Command Spells, combined with the latent power of this land, do not suffice to call forth a being so powerful as a god. I, too, must violate a few strictures to pull that off.”

And he crushed him.

“And you—you were to be my catalyst! A catalyst to summon a god! Why would you refuse that honor!? You have repaid my kindness with malice!”

The escapee could no longer even attempt to scream. He could see little but the darkness of the night and the ever-spreading red of his own blood.

And yet—

Even if breathing itself had become painful for him—

As he drank down the blood that spilled forth from his throat, he tried harder still to stand up.

Upon seeing the escapee that was unwilling to admit defeat, the mage sighed and—

He laid his foot on the escapee's back and mercilessly crushed the escapee under his weight.

“Enough of this. I have any number of spares at the ready.... You will return the Command Spells to me. Then, you will die. And you will die in the way I prescribe. I will throw you into a furnace and use your remains to build myself a new experimental subject.”

He extended his right hand towards the escapee's Command Spells.

The escapee could not care less about the Command Spells and whatnot.

He did not even know of the phrase “Holy Grail War”, let alone its meaning.

——live.

He, as a living being, merely obeyed the instincts that welled up within him.

——live. ——live.

Even then, as the end drew near, those instincts had not waned an iota.

——live. live. live.

——that was all that he was aware of.

——live. live. live. live live live live

——live. live. live. live live live live

live. live. live. live. live. live. live.

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—live!

Not “I don’t want to die.”

Nor was it quite “I want to live.”

It was not a desire, but rather a simple instinct,

The mere hope to “live.”

Had he himself noticed this distinction? Or—

Then again, did he even have the means to express the notion “I don’t want to die”?

His body slowly came to rest, but—

Out of all the living beings in the Snowfield area, his will was the strongest. And with that mighty will, he screamed.

“_____”

The mage did not realize what that scream meant—and so, he did not notice:

That in that instant, the ritual had been completed.

That the escapee’s scream was his alone; that it was his own form of magic; that those were words of summoning.

That, the mage did not know.

Just a moment ago, the fifth Servant had been summoned into the ravine to the north, and—

It seemed that the false Holy Grail was in a bit of a rush to manifest the sixth Servant.

Of course, from the very outset of this Holy Grail War, with the summoning of Rider, the nature of the summoning ritual had always been rather vague.

But in any case, it was in that moment that—

The sixth Servant finally descended upon the forests of Snowfield.

A brilliant light shot through the forest, and a mighty whirlwind swayed the nearby trees.

The mage was tossed a few meters away by the strong wind. Startled, he readied his gun—but just then, he felt an enormous rush of magical energy, and so, strengthened his Magic Circuits.

“Wha...”

Before his eyes, a being appeared, clad in a simple piece of cloth.

That the being was a Heroic Spirit was clearly evident from the overwhelming magical energy that poured forth from it.

At the same time, there was something unusual about it.

It looked far too plain to be a Hero.

It didn’t seem to have anything that could really be called “equipment”, and its clothing seemed rather shabby. Of course, it’s not like a Hero’s value depends on the value of his material possessions, but—even so, just what sort of Hero would be without even a single weapon?

He quietly surveyed the being.

——A woman?

Based just on its face, he would call it a woman.

It had lustrous skin and soft features.

However, its chest and its hips were hidden by the loose cloth it wore. Its limbs alone extended outside the cloth, and they seemed to be quite firm and taut.

——N-no, wait... that might be a man.... ...? Which is it...?

The Servant’s face seemed to retain some vaguely childlike features, making it easy to interpret as either a man’s face or a woman’s face. Either way, its body was firm. It was tensed like a coiled spring, and could likely rocket forth in the same manner. That much was clear to the eye. Whether it was a man or a woman, its face was beautiful all the same.

——Is... is that... is that even a... a human?

The mage felt a twinge of embarrassment.

It certainly had a human face, but there was something discomfiting about it. He couldn’t figure out how to describe it, but there was definitely something wrong with it. Perhaps it was just too per-

fect. There was nothing visually out of the ordinary about it, but its entire body exuded an odd aura—kind of like a mannequin. It was as though it were a puppet, in the magical sense.

He couldn't really make out its build, perhaps because of its loose garments. He became less and less certain whether the Heroic Spirit was a man or a woman, or indeed whether it was a human or something else altogether.

Nonetheless, one thing was for sure.

That Hero was unbearably beautiful.

It was a paradoxical being, possessing both the impurity characteristic of mankind and the immaculacy inherent to nature.

Its body was like the velvety boughs that enwrapped the statue of Venus. It was as though the Heroic Spirit's form defied classification as a man or a woman; a human or a beast; a god or a demon.

With the forest behind it, the Heroic Spirit, a being of perfect harmony, let its lustrous hair flutter in the wind and—

"Are you... the Master who called for me?" it asked of the wounded escapee, sprawled on the ground before it.

Ah, what a gentle voice it was.

Its voice, too, was androgynous. In the end, the mage would never learn its true identity.

The escapee was bewildered by the sudden flash of light and burst of wind that accompanied its appearance, but when he took one glance at it, he knew.

—The one who stands before me is not my enemy.

He knew that that alone was an absolute truth.

For a short while, he suppressed his urge to flee, and gazed intently at his savior.

His eyes were ever so pure, as if he were imagining what lay within the Heroic Spirit's very soul.

It quietly knelt down as the escapee staggered to his feet, so that it could look him in the eye, and—

“_____” said it, with words that the mage could not understand.

The escapee replied to it.

“_____” it responded, again quietly.

And then, the Heroic Spirit reached out and lifted the wounded escapee into its arms.

„Thank you. We have formed a contract.“

It spoke as if to a friend of countless many years—and so, the escapee felt relief.

He was granted life. His heart swelled large with emotion.

He knew he would have to flee no more—and at long last, he could collapse.

“Im... possible... impossible! This cannot be!” His shouts echoed about the forest.

Unable to understand what he was witnessing, the mage waved his gun about.

“This is preposterous! I will not stand for this!” he yelled.

As he did, he aimed his gun.

And at the end of his barrel laid—

A silver-coated wolf, its fur stained with blood and dirt, resting in the arms of the Hero.

“You troglodyte! This just... you have no abilities to speak of! You are a mere chimera! And *you* are a *Master*!? I cannot believe this!”

The mage continued to fiercely brandish his ornamented gun, taking careful aim.

“Please lower your gun. My Master does not wish you harm,” said the Heroic Spirit, quietly.

“Wha...”

He was surprised by the politeness with which it spoke, but more importantly, he was unsettled by the contents of its statement.

“As if! What sophistry...”

“I can understand the language of his kind... and in any case, it is not difficult to surmise what you have done to my Master.”

The mage tried to scoff at the Servant, but it continued to speak, a solemn expression on its face. “And yet, my Master does not wish you harm. ...Do you understand what this means?”

With that, it turned away from the mage and began to slowly walk towards the edge of the forest.

“W-wait! Please, wait! You desire the Holy Grail, do you not!? Would you not agree that you would have a better chance of attaining the Grail if I were your master, rather than that mangy cur?”

And when the Heroic Spirit heard that, it stopped in its tracks, and—

It turned around.

That was all.

And right away—the mage let out a short yelp. With his gun still in hand, he turned his back on the Heroic Spirit and the wolf and bolted into the forest.

So awesome was the power of interdiction¹ in the Heroic Spirit’s gaze.

When it had seen the mage vanish from its sight, it expunged the harsh hue from its eyes and set forth towards the river, to heal the animal it accepted as its Master.

It could neither hear the sound of running water, nor could it see any, but—

Even so, it could sense the presence of water off yonder. And so——

It kicked at the ground, gently holding the wolf to its chest, and bounded through the forest, as fast as a falcon.

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As he tore through the forest, the mage screamed internally.

¹拒否

——aa aAA aaaaAAA AAaaaaAAaAAaaaaaAaa——

He, who had been the pursuer, was now being pursued, as he wove his way past tree after tree.

——Why!

——Why! Why! Why, why, WHY!?

——Why was it that... that mangy cur!

——Why was it not me!

Neither the Heroic Spirit nor the silver wolf was chasing him.

He knew that, and yet, he fled, with all the power his legs could muster.

He fled from the unbearable shame and unalterable reality that followed him.

After he had run a while, the mage realized that he had, at some point, exited the forest—and remembered that his atelier was close by. Finally, he was able to let his legs slow down.

And then, when he had come to a complete stop, he turned to face the forest.

“Just... what *was* that Heroic Spirit!?” he wondered, talking to himself.

He had refined all the magic that he and his ancestors had developed to create that chimera. Its body contained far more Magic Circuits than that of any ordinary mage. Granted, its lifespan—both as an offering and as a living being—was extremely short, but that was alright, as it was merely a catalyst to be used to summon a Heroic Spirit.

And yet, *it*, of all things, received the Command Spells.

Even with all his experience as a mage, he could not understand how a mere beast—one that did not even understand what the Holy Grail War *was*—could become a Master.

“Was that a Hero with some connection to animals...? But that was just a chimera—not even an animal. It was a meat puppet. Perhaps it was a Hero with some connection to... chimeras...?”

Given that the wolf looked rather like a dog, the mage also considered the possibility that the Servant could have been the hound of

the Celts. In the end, though, he could not reconcile his image of that fierce warrior with what he saw of the Heroic Spirit.

“Tsk... well, so be it. I will just have to steal his Command Spells. No, actually, anyone’s Command Spells will do. I had best get started. If I sic the rest of my chimeras on them when they enter the town, I ought to be able to make off with that cur, at the least....”

He was already back in high spirits, with his senses back about him. He truly was worthy of praise as a mage.

Alas, it was not praise that awaited him, but—

“No, sir, we sure can’t have that.”

“? ——?. ...?!?”

“We really would prefer not to have any more sources of uncertainty. My *humblest* apologies.” Those cold words chilled him to the bone.

“——” The mage opened his mouth to ask who was there. From his throat came not words, but warm, red blood.

“We already have magi wandering around the city who didn’t manifest any Command Spells. It’d be a real pain if you went around causing trouble *on top of* the Holy Grail War. The Association and the Church are trouble enough. We can’t afford to make an enemy of the militia, you see. They *are* public servants, after all.”

Upon hearing him speak, the mage realized that the man standing before him was a man who once was a disciple of the puppeteer Rohngall—a man of the Association by the name of Faldeus.

Of course, more important to the mage than Faldeus’s affiliations was the question of how to stop his neck from spewing blood.

“Oh, no, don’t bother. Just listen as you are. I have no particular desire answer your questions, nor do I plan to let you live. As such, I have taken the liberty of slitting your throat.”

Faldeus slowly twirled a Swiss Army Knife in his hand. Drop after drop of red dripped from it. It was not a ritual weapon, of the sort typically used by magi, but rather, an ordinary knife, of the sort one might find in a typical outdoor recreation store.

“Tut-tut. Even if you weren’t expecting this to happen, you shouldn’t fall victim to an unenchanted knife. Your ancestors must be weeping.”

“—.” A wheezing sound came from the mage’s throat, but he was unable to draw a breath.

He was rapidly losing consciousness

“...come to think if it, who *are* you, anyway? Eh, whatever. Not like you can answer me anyway,” said Faldeus.

As Faldeus looked down on the mage, with his guard up as always, he slowly waved his right hand.

The mage felt a shock.

And that was the end. The mage’s consciousness left him, never to return.

When Faldeus waved his hand, innumerable many bullets flew through the air and rent the mage’s body.

Faced with that gory sight, Faldeus remained emotionless.

Perhaps because he could not even imagine the possibility that a stray bullet would hit him, he did not even breath harder as the bullets raced by in front of him.

Just like when he had Rohngall’s puppet destroyed, the gunshots were muffled. A leaden force sashayed through what had been the mage’s body.

When about half of the mage was gone, Faldeus waved his hand again.

In less than a second, the hailstorm of bullets ceased. Faldeus sat down on a nearby boulder. His expression finally softened some.

“I do beg your pardon. I’m something of a chatterbox, you see. I never know when I’m going to leak confidential information, so I can’t really have a good conversation unless I’m talking to a corpse,” he courteously said to the lump of flesh, which, of course, could not hear, let alone understand him.

“I must say, I’m a bit concerned about what the Kuruokas summoned.... And, to be honest, you’ve gone and made a huge mess yourself. I just had a look through your atelier, and... well, I’m astonished

that you would try to summon something on the level of a god. That's a foul against the system. Didn't you know that? Wars have rules too." Faldeus spoke fluidly and at length, now that he was speaking to a corpse. His former reticence had vanished altogether.

"Even if this whole business *is* some sort of test for us, we really do need you folks to have a bit of self-control."

Unlike when he had Rohngall's puppet destroyed, he did not have an army of underlings surrounding him. Also, he was speaking at a real corpse, not a mere puppet.

"I had a look at the footage we took in the forest... And, well, it's amazing that he—well, maybe her, so why don't we go with 'it'? ...In any case, it's amazing that it could be summoned as a Heroic Spirit. If you had managed to summon it as Berserker, you very well might have gained the power of a god that you so desired."

It seemed that Faldeus truly was surprised by what he saw, as evidenced by his emotional state.

Perhaps it was a pleasant surprise for him. A smile crept over his face.

"Well, the system shouldn't allow for that sort of thing, but seeing as how there're anomalous happenings everywhere, I wouldn't put too much faith in that. By Jove, someone might have even summoned something positively unspeakable in a secret hideout somewhere. Then again, that thing that your pet summoned is quite unspeakable itself." Faldeus gesticulated as he spoke, as if he were talking to an old friend. With a corpse on the ground before him, he spoke to himself, so as to reinforce his own understanding of the situation.

"To begin with, it was never so much a Hero..."

"As it was a Noble Phantasm of the gods themselves."

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Of course, that Hero had the body of a human.
However, it was not human.

Long, long ago, the gods fashioned a doll from clay and sent it to the earth to appear within a forest. That doll was neither male nor female; rather, it was phantasmal.

It lacked human knowledge, and so, it gamboled about the forest like a beast.

However, it had power that surpassed human understanding. When it was enraged, it was said to be mightier than even the Hero who ruled a certain kingdom at the time.

That king laughed at the doll with contempt. “Nary can my might be compared to that of a beast,” said he, refusing even to lay eyes upon it.

The king believed his power to supreme; that there could not be a being stronger than he. Thus, the king laughed off rumors of the beast.

When that beast met a certain celebrated hierodule, however, their fates changed forever.

When that genderless mass of clay met that woman whose beauty transcended gender, it fell in love at first sight.

As they spent six days and seven nights together, sharing meals and sharing a bed, the clay doll slowly assumed a human form, as if to imitate that beautiful prostitute.

The clay beast who was ignorant of mankind attempted to assume that prostitute’s beauty.

When it made that paradoxical beauty its own, the clay doll lost much of its strength. In exchange, it gained human wisdom and reason.

Though it had lost much of its divinity—
Its power still far exceeded that of man.

And then, the doll, now endowed with the body and the wisdom of a human, stood before that mighty king.

They fought a battle that shook the heavens and the earth, and once the battle was over, each acknowledged the other’s strength.

The golden king and the clay doll.

Surely, there could be no beings further apart than they. Nonetheless, each became the other's one and only friend. They embarked on countless many adventures, sharing their pain and their pleasure with one another.

And then, millennia after those golden-and-earthen days—
Their fates changed forever again————

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At a stream perhaps ten kilometers distant, the Heroic Spirit cursorily treated the wounds of the silver wolf—its Master—and laid him down to rest.

„I must say... I am relieved. I was worried that the whole world had been buried like Uruk, but it seems the world is as beautiful as ever.“

It looked at the vast wilderness before it. Using the language of beasts, it described the world to its Master, as it lay at its Master's side.

However, its Master had already fallen into a deep sleep, and did not reply.

Laughing softly, it sat down, and gave itself over to the sound of the flowing water, when—

Suddenly, it turned to look northwards.

Using its class ability, Presence Detection¹—it detected a presence far, far to the north. A very familiar presence.

Indeed, it detected the presence right as the golden-armored Heroic Spirit walked out of the cave

“Could it be—”

Unable at first to believe what fate had wrought, it opened its eyes wide and—

¹気配感知

“...is it you?”

It was sure that the presence it sensed to the north was none other than the king it knew. It slowly stood up.

A short silence.

In that while, just what went through its mind?

Bewilderment.

Consternation.

And finally—overwhelming joy.

Not only did fate bring them both to the Holy Grail War, but it also afforded them another opportunity to engage in mortal combat.

But what of that?

Even if it took his head, and he took its heart, what of it?

The ties that bound them would not fray from a duel or two.

Nay, even if they slew one another a thousand times over, they would hold strong.

“Haha...”

It let a very natural smile appear on its face. It opened its arms wide and—

“What fun it would be... to continue with the duel we fought on that plaza.”

With its arms outstretched, it sang in a mighty voice, from the very core of its being.

It was a gentle voice.

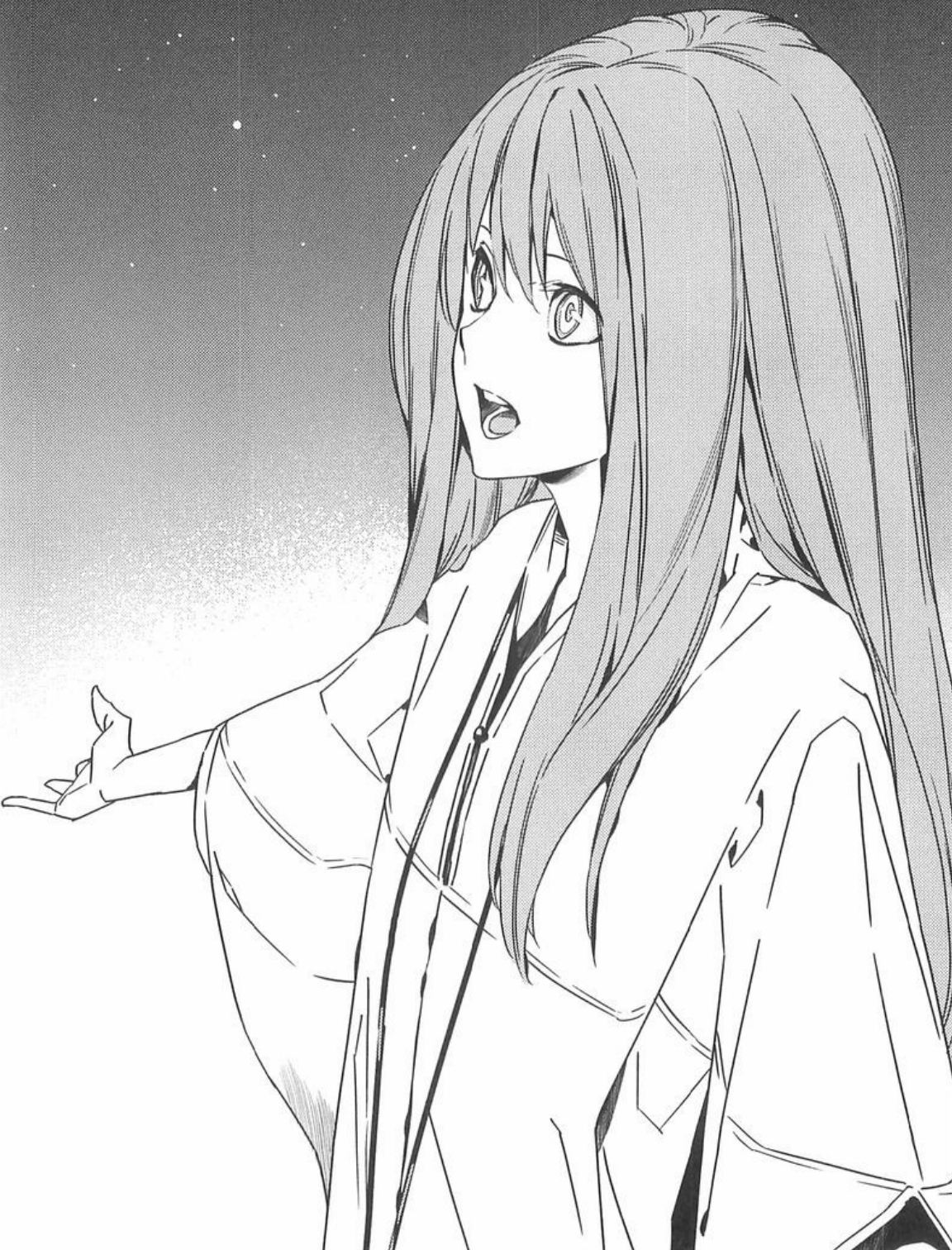
The Hero Enkidu.

Its song shook the very earth, becoming like a beautiful undulation of the land that reached every part of the Snowfield area.

That was evidence that all the Servants had assembled——

And it was also a signal to commence battle.

All the magi and Heroic Spirits had convened on this false stage.



They sought to dance upon it—despite knowing that this Holy Grail War was a false one.

Truth and falsehood were secondary to their desires.

They fought not for the Holy Grail, but for their convictions——

It was a Holy Grail War for them alone.

That was the spark that began the war.

Epilogue: Player

You—came to the city of Snowfield as a traveller, unaware of the battle cry that night split the earth half a day prior.

You went into a drugstore near the entrance to the city and asked if there were any cheap, single-story motels nearby.

The fellow manning the counter had a mohawk. His appearance belied his friendly nature, though. He pointed out a few nearby motels for you. He also mentioned some similarly-priced hotels nearby, but you politely declined his suggestions.

The man with the mohawk looked at you curiously. He eventually turned his gaze to your hands and your neck.

“Hey, those are some slick tattoos, buddy,” he murmured.

You forced yourself to chuckle at his comment as you left the store and looked at your own two hands.

On your left hand and your right hand, identical sigils were present. But you already knew that.

A sigil was inscribed on each of your shoulders and on your back, as well.

A drifter who wandered into Snowfield in the midst of a war, bearing five Command Spells: that’s who you are.

You might be a man, or perhaps a woman.

Your ethnicity and your build are known to no-one else.

You could be a criminal, or a saint, or a faker.

You are in your late teens, or maybe your early twenties.

You have the freedom to decide what you want to do in this place.

You might meet the golden king and the red-skinned girl.

You might meet the mage who lacks malice and the murderer who lacks a body.

You might meet a woman of deep faith and the vampire who chases after her.

You might be imprisoned by those countless many policemen, equipped with bizarre weaponry.

You might be abducted into the dream of the bedridden girl.

You might meet a noble beast and the Heroic Spirit who stands at its side.

You might choose to fight alongside any of them, or choose to kill all of them.

Betrayal, trust, ambush, abscondment. It's all up to you.

You may destroy everything you encounter. You may save everything you encounter.

However, you are bound by certain constraints.

Rule: You cannot enter buildings that contain elevators.

Rule: From time to time, you will have visions of a bloodstained girl.

Rule: Once upon a time, you lived in Fuyuki, Japan.

Rule: It seems that you were fleeing *something* when you came to America.

Depending on what you do, you might or might not overcome these obstacles.

But no matter what, you cannot escape from your Command Spells.

You know that running away will result in your death. That knowledge is ingrained into your body.

You are connected to various Heroic Spirits by your Command Spells.

Unlike other Servants, your Servants cannot be summoned continuously.

If you use your power to call forth a Servant, you will lose a Command Spell and the protection it offered.

You have access to five one-time Servants.

Depending on how you use them, you could annihilate all the other Servants.

Indeed, you—

You came to this town to fill the gap left by the lost Saber class.

However, you are not a mage. You are a mere human.

As for why you're in this situation in the first place—

It began three days ago—

Perhaps we should begin with the time when you met a certain woman in Las Vegas.

After she forced you to accept the Command Spells, she whispered to you.

“To subvert all that came about as a result of the Fifth War—”

“To make everything into nothing once again—including all the sacrifices that were made—”

“To achieve those goals, we will seize the false Holy Grail.”

It's not clear how much you understood the things she said.

You merely remember that she was uncommonly beautiful.

It was like a fairy tale. She, with her white hair and pale skin, led you here, and then——

Once you've designed your character, the rest of the story can take place in-game!

Afterword

Hello, everyone—I'm Narita Ryohgo, the author of this bonus volume.

I'm sure that all of you *Fate* fans are wondering “Who the heck is this guy?”, and to be honest, I'm a bit discombobulated right now myself—but anyway, let me just say hello for the time being.

When I first met Nasu, the scenario writer for *Fate*, I was in the middle of reading *Kara no Kyoukai* and hadn't yet gotten around to playing *Fate*, but—when I played the PS2 version, I was overwhelmed by just how interesting it was, and quickly found myself wrapped up in the Type-Moon world.

I'm sure that many fans have thought about creating their own Servants. As for myself, I contacted my good friend Nasu and told him about my ideas. I really am an outrageous pain-in-the-neck fan. That's just who I am.

Oh, and I just remembered one more terrible thing I did as a fan.

“Hey, while I'm at it, why don't I make an April Fools' joke out of it?”

That's kind of like saying “Well, the weather is nice today, so I'm going go for a run on the freeway”. Without really thinking too far in advance, I wrote a story about the Servants I invented, and then I uploaded it to my personal home page as “Prologue to *Fake*: a new game”. And that became this story.

And then what? The people at Type-Moon put a link to it on their website, and within 24 hours, I had gotten 300,000 hits. It was crazy!

I never expected this... but I guess some things just happen. That golden king appeared before me. Would my mere existence be disrespectful enough to get King Goldy to kill me? That's how flustered I was.

Remember, this novel was written as the prologue to a game. Everything from here forward is up to you, dear readers and players. You have the freedom to move around the city; to negotiate with the other Masters, or to betray them. And so, this story is filled with endless possibilities—who knows how it'll evolve to its conclusion?

I've thought about some stuff like the "All Masters Survive" route; the "Assassin-as-a-Child" route; the "King Gil vs. Enkidu Showdown" route, and so forth... but for the time being, let's just stick with the "Use Your Imagination" route. I wonder what's going to happen now. I also talked with Nasu about a route in which all the Masters die after an utterly inhumane war; we decided to leave that one to Urobuchi. I'm sure that Nasu would write secret routes in which Rin, Sakura, and Wakame¹ would show up, too. After he finishes his new game² and DDD, that is.

It'd be a massive undertaking, though, only made possible by the wellspring of energy that is *Fate*.

I began writing this for April Fools' towards the end of March. Within three days, I'd written enough to fill about 140 pages of a standard paperback-sized book³. To be honest, I wrote it significantly faster than I would write one of my own novels.

I got the energy to do that from *Fate*, that great Type-Moon game. Once I started writing this side story, I couldn't stop. I got so much energy from *Fate* that I'm still smoldering.

Anyway: To Mr. Nasu, for looking into the nitty-gritty details of the novel's setting when I sent it over to him on April Fools' day without

¹Matou Shinji

²The timing of *Fate/strange fake*'s release suggests that the game in question is *Fate/EXTRA*

³i.e. *bunkobon* format, or A6 paper

warning — To all the people at Type-Moon who sanctioned this novel and linked to my personal home page on their website, especially Mr. Takeuchi — To the folks at Type-Moon Ace who published this novel — To Mr. Sanda Makoto, for helping me write up the fake explanation of the game mechanics — To Ms. Morii Shizuki, for illustrating this novel more beautifully than I could hope for and for letting the characters bloom — And, last but certainly not least, to all you wonderful readers, for persevering to the end of this somewhat bizarre novel——

Thank you so very much...!

Narita Ryohgo

Extra: “Nasu, the Editor-in-Chief”

I was thinking about how certain Type-Moon fans might feel if Nasu’s new work were to be delayed because he was helping me edit this novel. Heck, some of them might even liken me to OP. But anyway, if you wanted to know just what went on in those editing sessions—

Me: At first, I was planning on giving Assassin’s Master the ability to change his face and his overall appearance by rotating a revolver-based tattoo on his chest, but then I figured that would be kind of excessive, so I tossed that idea.

Nasu: That sounds great!

Me: Really!?

Nasu: We could make his nickname ‘the Sixfold Cylinder’, and have him jam up from time to time. Ah, wait. I guess revolvers don’t jam....

Me: A cross-dresser¹ ...?

Nasu and Me: And he’s really a little girl!

Me: I’ll do it!

Nasu: This is your brain on video games....

¹“cross-dresser” 「男装」 and “cylinder” 「弾倉」 are homophones (*dansō*) in Japanese

And so, Assassin's Master, Jester, ended up having the power of the Sixfold Cylinder. When he runs out of “faces” to use, he reverts to his true form: a little girl (or maybe a toddler, or maybe a cougar). And then, it's yuri time. There you have it—a Nasu production. Nasu said that he “couldn't see Assassin giving up the Grail to any man, given how super-tough she is”, so I tried to realize those hot-blooded and valorous ideas in the story.

...Well, anyway, the story ended having a number of these silly ideas in it.

I'd be oh-so-pleased if you would read this with the same spirit of silliness in mind.

Let's also be sure to look forward to Type-Moon's next work. Yahoo!

...And now that I've flattered everyone under the sun, I've just about filled my page quota.

I would love to have the opportunity to work with Type-Moon and its fans again sometime. Well then, thank you very much for reading this hack's writings...!

Narita Ryohgo, yet again



I was the illustrator. It was tremendously fun doing these illustrations, both as part of my work and as a reader of this novel. Many thanks to all the readers, browsers, and everyone else who has looked at this novel!

Morii Shizuki

あとがき
Afterword

Back matter

Afterword from the translator

Fate/strange fake is probably my favorite part of the *Fate* franchise now. Narita Ryohgo is an excellent writer of prose, better than either Nasu or Urobuchi, which made *F/sf* quite a pleasure to read. I kind of wish that this would actually be made into a game (or an anime, or something), but I think we all know that that's never going to happen (hell, Narita can't/won't even get a second season for *Baccano!* and *Durarara!!* for whatever reason).

Anyway, I hope you enjoyed reading this translation of *Fate/strange fake*. If you have any questions or comments about the novel, my translation of it, or anything else of that sort, drop me an email at nakulas.sd@gmail.com. Supplementary material to *Fate/strange fake* can be found at my blog (<http://nakulas.blogspot.com>; specifically, [here](#), in the *Fate/strange fake* complete collection).

Aside: this translation is a Japanese→English translation. This *should* go without saying, but given the existence of monstrosities like Japanese→Russian→English and Japanese→Chinese→English translations, I suppose I have to make this clarification. For the record, I am a native English speaker (American with some Commonwealth influence), and non-native but JLPT N1+ in Japanese, which, in my view is pretty much a bare minimum qualification for being able to effectively translate extended prose from Japanese to English.

Note also: you can find some discussion of certain translatorial

choices in the [Beast's Lair thread](#) for *Fate/strange fake*. This content is also available in the *Fate/strange fake* complete collection on my blog.

nakulas

Acknowledgments

- [food](#) from the Beast's Lair forums, for doing a [partial translation](#) of *Fate/strange fake*, from which I took some inspiration.
- [aldeayeah](#) and some other people from the Beast's Lair forums, for helpful commentary and criticism.
- [TeX.SE](#), for making it possible to navigate all the intricacies and absurdities of \LaTeX (and X_{\LaTeX}). (See the `.tex` source files for pointers to particular questions that were helpful.)
- @JTFrjiII533udvj+XNvh2y0NGV3 on PD for the scans of *Fate/strange fake*
- And, of course, [Narita Ryohgo](#) for writing *Fate/strange fake* in the first place.

Revision history

- 0.0.1 (10 Apr 2013) - front matter and part 1 of prologue posted on Beast's Lair
- 0.0.2 (19 Apr 2013) - rest of prologue finished; fonts working properly.
- 0.1.0 (26 Apr 2013) - parts 1 and 2 of Archer posted on Beast's Lair; special title added.
- 0.2.0 (20 May 2013) - part 3 of Archer; parts 1 and 2 of Berserker; switched to draft mode.

- 0.3.0 (2 Jun 2013) - parts 3-7 of Berserker; part 1 of Assassin; forced L^AT_EX to bend to my will; font size to 11pt.
- 0.3.1 (5 Jun 2013) - parts 2-4 of Assassin.
- 0.4.0 (5 Jun 2013) - Caster; footnotes functioning; footers fixed; hyper-refs partially fixed.
- 0.5.0 (7 Jun 2013) - Rider.
- 0.6.0 (8 Jun 2013) - Lancer, complete with tikz squiggle.
- 0.7.0 (12 Jun 2013) - Epilogue, afterword, and omake. Translation overlays added; front matter consolidated; translator afterword added. Final draft version.
- 0.7.1 (14 Jun 2013) - Reduced version of novel designed for viewing on low-end devices; some minor corrections.
- 1.0.0 (25 Jul 2013) - Final version of *Fate/strange fake*, assuming I didn't make any huge goof-ups. Lots of minor edits here and there. I also finally got around to sticking my L^AT_EX source files on [bitbucket](#), so some of the changes between 0.7.1 and 1.0.0 have been tracked.